Plato's Persona

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Marsilio Ficino, Renaissance Humanism, and Platonic Traditions

Denis J.-J. Robichaud

PENN

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For Viveca

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Introduction

> His face was covered with a sanguine complexion and would present a graceful and placid countenance. His golden and curly hair would extend over his forehead.
>
> —Giovanni Corsi, *Life of Marsilio Ficino*

> I attempted during the previous days to paint the idea of the philosopher with Platonic colors. But if I had brought Plato himself before the public, certainly I would have pointed not to a certain picture of that idea of the true philosopher but rather to the idea of the true philosopher itself. Let us contemplate our Plato to see philosopher, philosophy and the idea itself together at the same time.
>
> —Marsilio Ficino, from a public lecture that he gave in Florence, which he later published as the *De vita Platonis*

Ficinus Personatus

Anyone with a passing acquaintance with Renaissance humanism and philosophy will know the name of Marsilio Ficino (1433–99) and associate him with Platonism or Neoplatonism, the august Medici family, and the Platonic Academy of Florence, long thought to have been the central philosophical institution of the Renaissance city. Those who are a little more familiar with him will undoubtedly think of his achievement of completing the first full Latin translations, along with copious commentaries, of Plato's dialogues and of Plotinus's *Enneads*, of translating numerous other Platonists, such as Alcinous, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus, Synesius, Priscianus Lydus, and Michael Psellus, or perhaps of translating Dante's *Monarchia*. They will certainly think of Ficino's celebrated and influential commentary on the *Symposium*, the *De amore*—a work that inspired the learned community of Europe during the Renaissance, as well as

volumes of modern scholarship on the arts from the period. Some may know that Ficino also published a number of translations of and commentaries on works that are now considered pseudonymous, including the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and the Pythagorean *Symbola* and *Aurea verba* (as well as works attributed to Speusippus and Xenocrates). His translation of the largest corpus of Neopythagorean philosophy, Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*, was formerly thought to be lost but survives in manuscripts, as do his translations of Theon of Smyrna's *Mathematica* and Hermias's commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*.[1] His translations of the *Orphic Hymns* are now lost, and only highly fragmentary evidence survives for his Latin renditions of Proclus's *Elements of Theology* and *Elements of Physics*.[2]

It is no exaggeration to say that Ficino was a giant among Renaissance translators, but he also trained his scholarly and philosophical sights on religion and theology. His titanic efforts produced an eighteen-volume *Platonic Theology* that attempts to reorient theology by aligning it with Platonic traditions. The arguments that Ficino advances in that work might have influenced the Fifth Lateran Council's adoption of the soul's immortality as church dogma in 1512.[3] He wrote other religious works: *De Christiana religione*, numerous other tracts, sermons, and homilies, and the beginnings of a commentary on St. Paul's *Epistles*. An inquiry into the nature of the divine also frames his *De vita libri tres* (*Three Books on Life*, or simply *De vita*), which are nothing less than the cornerstone of Renaissance theories of melancholy, Saturnine genius, and astral influences.

The twelve books of correspondence by Ficino (to humanists, philosophers, theologians, artists, poets, statesmen, princes, kings, clergymen, cardinals, and popes) bear witness to his recognition and influence during his lifetime. The presence of his writings in the libraries of later humanists, scholars, theologians, and philosophers demonstrates his reception in subsequent generations. As his writings show, during his life Ficino was cast in various roles: philosopher, commentator, translator, philologist, theologian, priest, friend, client, doctor, and humanist—each part always played with a Platonic accent. Almost any single composition from Ficino's oeuvre would have been enough to ensure his fame, but the present book is concerned with the central nucleus of his intellectual work as a whole: his understanding of the Platonic corpus.

Given the fact that the learned world of the medieval Latin West did not have access to the Platonic dialogues save for the *Phaedo*, the *Meno*, parts of the *Timaeus* (and indeed there was a flourishing of work on the *Timaeus* in twelfth-century Chartres), and the *Republic*—and even the manuscripts of these works were not widely obtainable—the availability of Plato's dialogues in the quattro-

cento in Ficino's 1484 printed edition can in no way be overestimated. The rediscovery of the Platonic corpus had an impact over the course of the following centuries in all intellectual and cultural spheres. Not merely confined to a doxographical knowledge of a series of set doctrines (metempsychosis, palingenesis, anamnesis, the immortality of the soul, theory of forms, and so forth), students of Plato now had access to the dialogues themselves, which revealed to Renaissance audiences the rich ancient landscape of myths, allegories, philosophical arguments, etymologies, fragments of poetry and other works of philosophy, aspects of ancient pagan religious practices, concepts of mathematics and natural philosophy, and the dialogic nature of the Platonic corpus's interlocutors (*prosopa*/*personae*).[4]

With the exception of a very small but ever-growing group of Renaissance scholars who not only could read ancient Greek but also had access to the manuscripts of Plato's dialogues, most readers in the Latin West encountered Plato's text through Ficino's translations. Today there are only three extant manuscripts that contain the complete Platonic corpus. The astounding fact that Ficino had two of them at his disposal, as well as another complete manuscript that is now lost to us, and that he was in correspondence with the Greek émigré Cardinal Bessarion (1403–72), who possessed the third complete text that still exists, underscores that even if other philosophers and scholars made vital contributions to our knowledge of Plato, Ficino was the key intermediary between Greek and Latin, as well as between manuscript and print. As Ficino likes to say, he gave voice to Plato as well as various ancient traditions and frameworks to interpret his dialogues.[5]

In the first epigraph quoted at the outset of this introduction, from the first biography of Ficino, written seven years after his death, Giovanni Corsi (1472–1547) describes the philosopher's face. Is Corsi's portrait Ficino's true likeness? Paul Oskar Kristeller argued that Corsi did not know Ficino and that this first literary portrayal of him, although containing a few pieces of valuable information, is but a persona of a Medicean philosopher composed by a biographer to praise his Medici patrons.[6] Raymond Marcel objected that Corsi would have seen and heard the elder philosopher before his death. At the very least he would have known of Ficino, since he studied under Ficino's Platonic disciple Francesco Cattani da Diacceto (1466–1522). Corsi also frequented the circle of intellectuals who gathered for discussion at the Rucellai gardens, the Orti Oricellari, many of whom knew Ficino personally. In fact, Corsi writes that he composed his *Life of Marsilio Ficino* to console Bindaccio da Ricasoli (1444–1524) because Ricasoli and Ficino's close friend Bernardo Rucellai (1448–1514) departed from Florence

to France in a self-imposed exile.[7] It is safe to conclude that Corsi composed the *Life of Marsilio Ficino* primarily from remembrances that he would have heard in conversation with older Florentines, and most important, as I will argue, from Ficino's own self-portrayal drawn from his epistolography and writings. Corsi outlines the contours of his subject's life and character in the biography's first sentence: Ficino is the first guide to the divine Plato's inner sanctum, helping reveal its mysteries to others. Corsi's Ficino is, above all, Plato's interpreter.[8]

Ficino's identity as a philosopher, it is clear, began and ended with his relationship to Plato and Platonism. Throughout his career the writings of Ficino untiringly constructed his identity as a philosopher in the Platonic family. In the second epigraph quoted above—a passage from his *De vita Platonis* that was originally composed as a public oration and later served as the introduction to his printed translation of Plato—Ficino describes his attempt to paint the idea of the philosopher, which he claims resulted in the living image of Plato himself.[9] In explicitly stating that he is composing a philosophical picture through Platonic colors, Ficino deploys rhetorical techniques common to his Ciceronian humanist brethren, describing particular compositional styles through such visual metaphors as *color*, *figura*, *lineamenta*, and so on, and employing rhetorical *enargeia* to paint, as it were, a vivid portrait of Plato.[10] Thus in describing his own style as Platonic, Ficino makes his form fit with the content of his subject matter, inscribing himself into the very Platonic portrait that he is painting. His figural relationship with Plato would later become reified in a bronze medal produced circa 1499 in the style of Niccolò Fiorentino (1418–1506) that has the profile of Ficino on one face and the name *Platone* on the other (Figure 1). The medal suggests Ficino's identity as "another Plato" or "alter Plato" as the Neo-Latin poet Naldo Naldi (c. 1436–1513) called him in the versed preface to Ficino's 1484 edition of the Platonic corpus.[11]

Withdrawn from the public stage in Florence where he first delivered his speech on the *De vita Platonis*, Ficino, in his private study, illuminated in his own hand the portrait of Plato's face in the capital initial of Plato's name at the beginning of Apuleius's (c. 125–c. 170 CE) *De Platone et eius dogmate* in his personal manuscript containing various works of philosophy and theology (Figure 2). There is an analogous representation of Ficino in the dedicatory copy of Ficino's *Platonic Theology* for Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–92). Ficino's own resemblance is there inscribed in the illuminated capital of Plato's name (Figure 3). In the first illumination Ficino draws Plato's expression facing the reader (Ficino himself) with a round ink dot representing the philosopher in the act of speech. That Ficino took the time to illuminate Plato's face in his private manuscript

FIGURE 1. Medal of Marsilio Ficino (c. 1499) in the style of Niccolò Fiorentino (1430–1514). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Samuel H. Kress Collection. 1957.14.862.a.

reveals the playful and close personal intimacy that he believed he shared with Plato. In the second image Ficino is in profile, hands clasping a book, staring at or reading, so to speak, the first line of text "Plato, the father of philosophers." It communicates Ficino's private motivations to a larger circle of acquaintances, once more associating Ficino's public identity with Plato. At the end of the *Phaedrus*, Plato had written that philosophers plant their seeds not only in their written works but also in the minds or souls of their students, converting them to the philosophical life. Circumscribed by Plato's name, the illumination of Ficino identifies him as one of Plato's philosophical children and heirs.

Ficino's figural relationship to Plato is also present in other illuminations in deluxe manuscripts of his works. There is one image of Ficino sitting at his desk with his writing instruments working away in silence, presumably on his *Platonic Theology*.[12] Something else is at play, however, in most other manuscript illuminations of Ficino, even when they are manuscripts of his translations of the works of others. He is frequently depicted holding a book, sometimes closed but often open. In the latter case, when the book is open, both Ficino and his book are always portrayed facing the reader, as if inviting him or her to read or converse.[13] Moreover, Ficino is frequently shown with a group of persons, almost always ancient Greeks (identified as such by their beards and clothing) and at times with contemporary humanists. He is thus engaged in figural conversation with ancient philosophers and fellow intellectuals. The illuminations inscribe Ficino within a philosophical family.

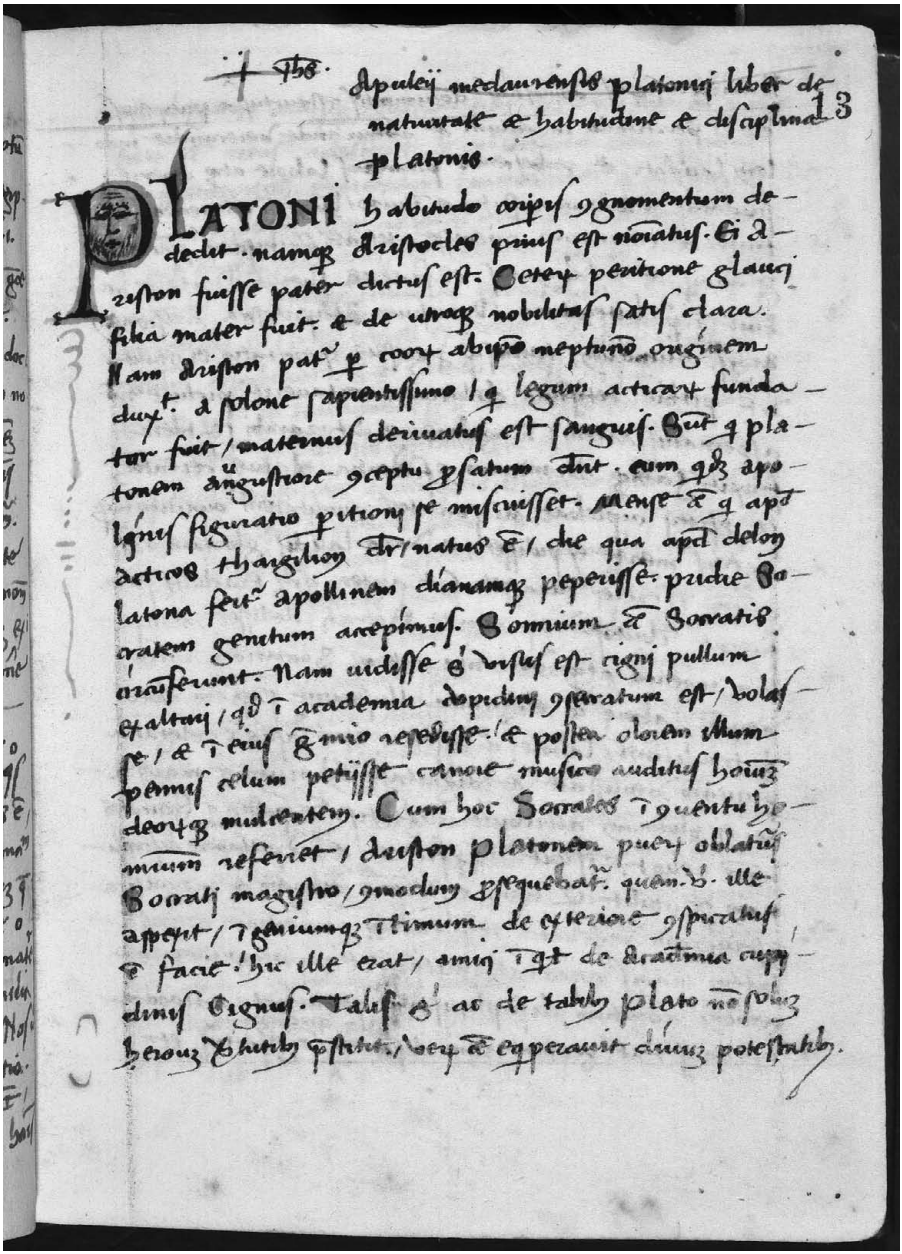

FIGURE 2. An illuminated portrait of Plato—done by Ficino himself—in the capital initial of Plato's name in a manuscript owned and copied by Ficino. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 709, f. 13r.

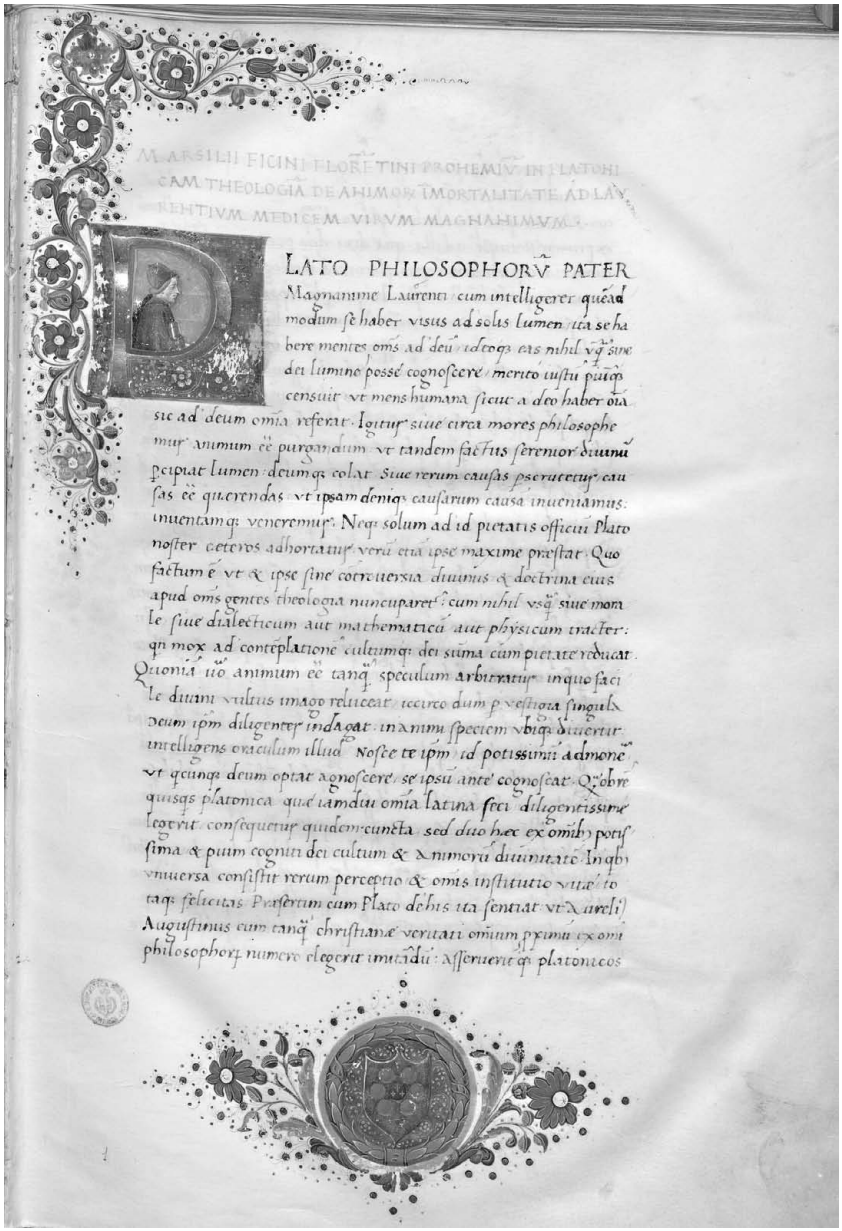

FIGURE 3. An illuminated portrait of Ficino in the capital initial of Plato's name in the dedicatory copy of Ficino's *Platonic Theology* for Lorenzo de' Medici. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 83.10. f. 1r.

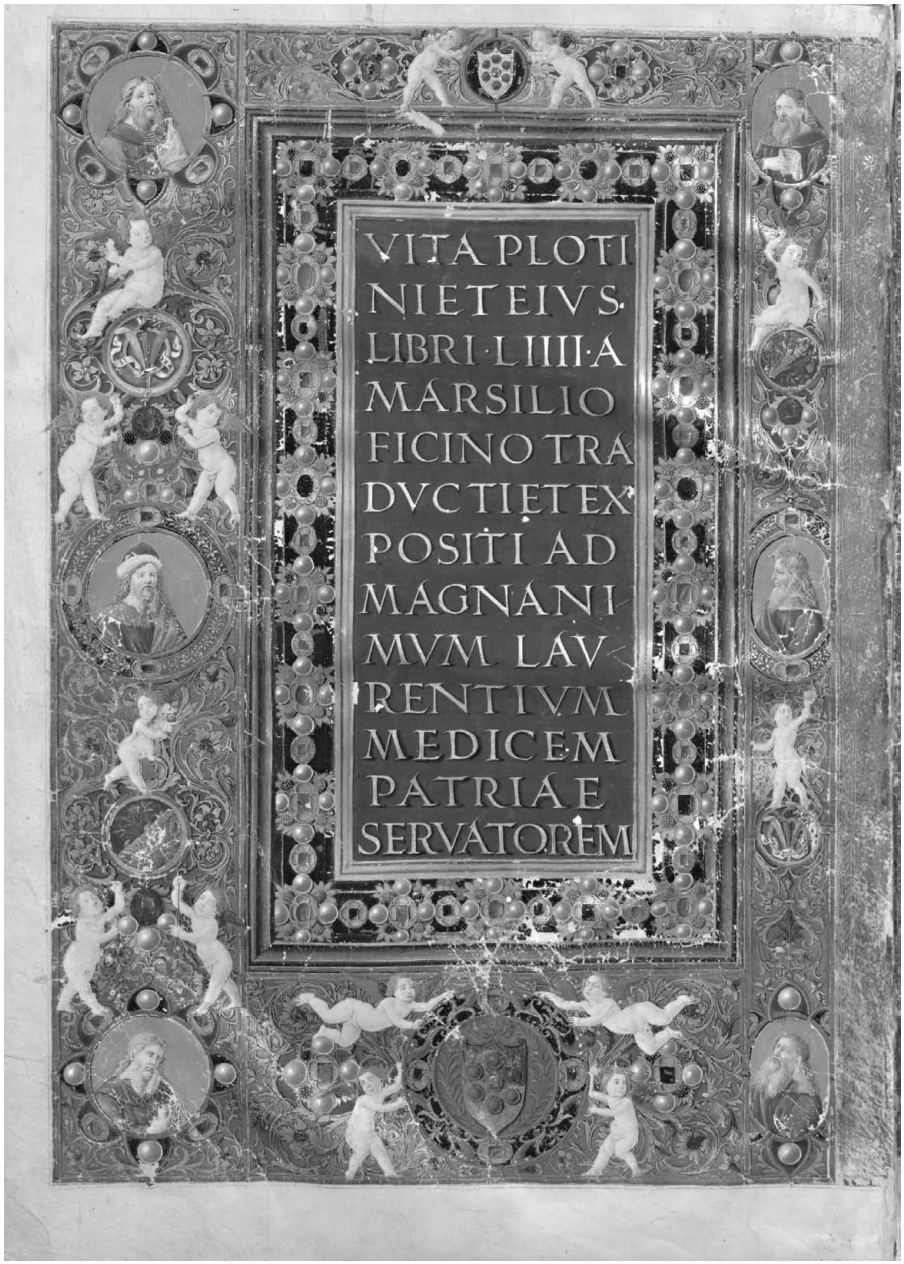

Figure 4. MS. Florence, Bibliotheca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 82.10, ff. 2v–3r.

PROHEMIVM MARSILII FICINI FLORENTINI INLIBROS PLOTINI AD MAGNANIMVM LAVRENTIVM MEDICEM PATRIAE SERVATOREM

AGNVS COSMVS

Senatus consulto patrie p̄r. quo tempore cōciliū inter Grecos atq latinos sub Eugenio Pontifice Florētie tractabatur. plurimi grecorum nomine Gemistum cognomine Plotonem quasi Platonem alterū de mysteriis Platonicis disputatione frequenter audiuit. eiusq ore feruenti sic afflatus & promptus. sic animatus. ut in academia quadam alta mente conceperit. hāc opportuno primū tempore parturus. Deinde dum coceptum tantū magnus ille Medices quadamnō parturiret. me electissimi medici siu ficinū filium ad huc puerum tanto opi destinauit. Ad hoc ipsum educauit mdies. operā preterea dedit. ut omes non solum Platonis. sed et Plotini libros grecos herm. Possibet aut anno millesimo quadringentesimo sexagesimo tertio. quo ego trigesimū agebam etatis annum mihi mercurium primo tre maximi mox Platone mandauit me pretadum. Mercuriū paucis mēsibus ac uiuente pcm. Platone tuc & sum aggressus. Et si Plotinū in desidebat. nullū in dubium me ptando ferre uerebum. ne grauiore me pondere semel pmero uideret. Tanta enim uir tanta erga suos clementia. in omes tanta modestia. ut neq ego qd si nec cateri aggredi Plotinū aliqn cogitauit. Verum interea Cosmus qd uiuens olim materna retinuit. tandē expressit. ut potius ipse prosit & alio. quo u. tempore Platone latinū dedi. legendū. hercules ille Cosmi auus heroica johānis sicī mirandule mente. nescio quo instigante. ut Florentia & ipe qī

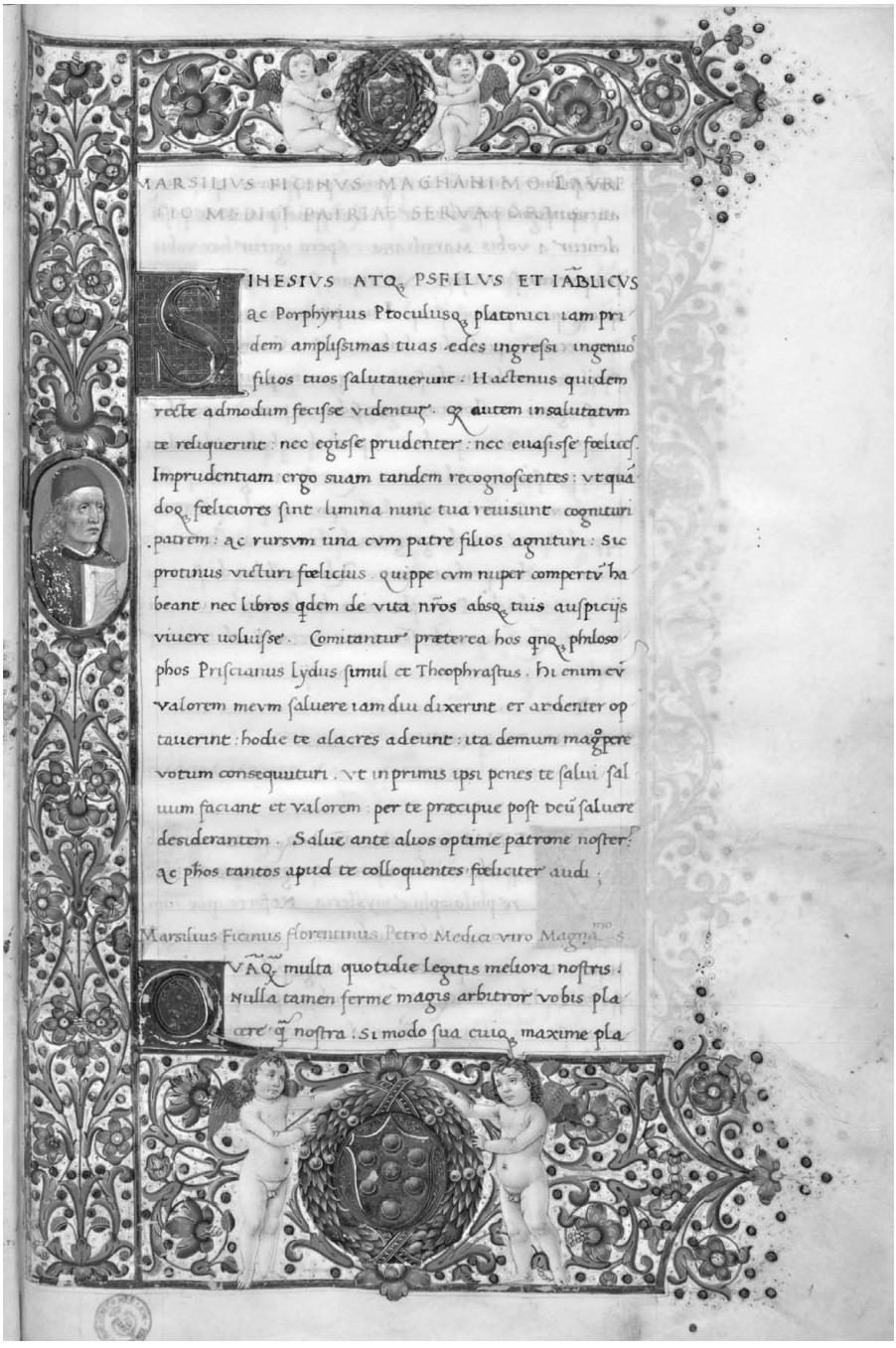
MARSILIVS FICINVS MAGHANI MEDICIS LAVRE
IO MEDICI PATRIAE SERVATORI
IHESIVS ATQ PSELLVS ET IAMBLICVS
ac Porphyrius Proculusq platonici iam pri
dem ampliſsimas tuas edes ingreſsi ingenuo
filios tuos ſalutauerunt. Hactenus quidem
recte admodum feciſse videntur. Q autem insalutatum
te reliquerunt nec egiſse prudenter nec euaſisse fœlicis
Imprudentiam ergo suam tandem recognoſcentes: vtquã
duo fœliciores ſint lumina nunc tua reuisunt cogniturí
patrem: ac rursum una cum patre filios agnituri: Sic
protinus victuri fœlicius quippe cum nuper compertũ ha
beant nec libros qdem de vita nr̃os absq tuis auſpicijs
viuere voluiſſe. Comitantur' prætercea hos qnq phloso
phos Priſcianus Lydus ſimul et Theophraſtus. Hi enim cũ
valorem meum ſaluere iam diu dixerint et ardenter op
tauerint hodie te alacres adeunt: ita demum magpere
votum consequuturi. Vt inprimis ipsi penes te ſalui ſal
uum faciant et valorem per te præcipue poſt deũ ſaluere
desiderantem. Salue ante alios optime patrone noſter
ac phos tantos apud te colloquentes fœliciter audi;
Marsilius Ficinus florentinus Petro Medici viro Magno
QVAQ multa quotidie legitis meliora noſtris
Nulla tamen ferme magis arbitror vobis pla
cere q noſtra. Si modo ſua cuiq maxime pla

Figure 5. Detail of the illumination of Marsilio Ficino in MS. Florence, Bibliotheca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 82.15, f. 1r.

Whether the manuscript contains the works of only one author or of many, the identification of Ficino's intellectual vocation remains the same. For instance, in the volume of the *Enneads* (Figure 4) given to Lorenzo de' Medici, Plotinus (204/5–70 CE), the author, is shown in an illumination by Attavante degli Attavanti (1452–1525) with numerous other figures (Plotinus is perhaps the figure on the right holding the open book in Figure 4), while Marsilio, the translator and commentator, is in the illuminated initial.[14] In another manuscript given to Lorenzo de' Medici, containing the works of several philosophers and Neoplatonists, one finds an illumination, once more by Attavanti, of only one person: Ficino (Figure 5). Attavanti depicts him facing the reader with an open book. His hand is proportional both to his image in the illumination and to the size of a normal nota bene manicule indication in manuscript margins. It therefore points both to the text of the book in the illumination and to the text of the actual book in which the illumination is drawn: "Synesius, Psellus, Iamblichus, Porphyry, Proclus, and other Platonists long ago came into your most distinguished household, and saluted your ingenious sons, and indeed until now they seem to have acted honorably. Because they departed without saluting you, however, they also seem to have acted imprudently and to have left unhappy. Therefore, recognizing at some time at last their imprudence they are happier, and they now look upon your threshold once more to become acquainted with the father, and in turn to be acknowledged as children together with the father."[15] His hand identifies Ficino as an interpreter, and it points directly to "father," "patrem," the central link in the letter. More than a mere statement about patronage, the dedicatory letter's theme weaves together patronage and philosophy; the Medici with the Platonic family. In 1489 Ficino had indeed dedicated a volume containing the works of Iamblichus (c. 240–c. 325 CE), Synesius (c. 373–c. 414 CE), Porphyry (234–c. 305 CE), and Proclus (412–85 CE) to Lorenzo's son Giovanni (1475–1521), who later became Pope Leo X, when the thirteen-year-old boy was elevated to the position of cardinal. Later, Ficino writes to Lorenzo that Priscianus Lydus (fl. sixth century CE) and Theophrastus (c. 371–c. 287 BCE) join their company. These philosophers might have saluted Lorenzo's son in the previous edition dedicated to Giovanni, but now they return to the father Lorenzo. Lorenzo, however, is not the only father in the letter. Ficino intertwines Neoplatonic philosophy into the rhetoric of his dedicatory letter. He is playing with Plotinus's similes that the descent of souls from their source in a higher hypostasis is like individuals proceeding out of a palace, and like children taken from their father who are ignorant of their parent.[16] With the new edition dedicated to Lorenzo these philosophers return to their

father and become happy, like souls returning to their divine fatherland. The whole structure of the letter follows the Neoplatonic metaphysical triad of procession, return, and remaining—an order that, as will be seen in this book, Ficino often employs.

Ficino continues to pile layers of meaning into the imagery. Punning on books (*liber, -bri*) and children (*liber, -beri*), he further identifies himself, in the manner intended by Plato in the *Phaedrus*, as the father of these books and/or philosophers. Ficino asks that they be allowed to cross the threshold to Lorenzo's house and be recognized as legitimate members of the Medici household. The metaphor of the threshold and the home is closely related to the idea of a family in the construction of an intellectual identity. Ficino describes an economy of philosophers, delineating who is in the philosophical family and (implicitly) who is not.[17] When he writes about books as people in this manner he is employing a prosopopoeic device that allows him either to make ancient works speak to contemporary audiences or to place them in conversation with one another. There is a dialogic quality to this that is evident in the letter's closing sentence: "Farewell our greatest patron before all others, and happily hear so many philosophers conversing with you."[18] Instead of being a symbol meant only for private study, Ficino's nota bene manicule in the margins inscribes his work with dialogic traits.

Ficino's philosophical identity had a centripetal force to it that often placed him at the center of intellectual communities. Yet the same conversations and writings also held a centrifugal force that carried the danger of alienating him from other communities. Around the beginning of 1487 Ficino wrote a letter to Marco Barbo (1420–91), the Venetian cardinal of San Marco who, previously in his ecclesiastical career, had been asked in 1468 by his distant cousin Pope Paul II to investigate the Roman Academy of Pomponio Leto (1425–98), Filippo Buonaccorsi (1437–69), and Bartolomeo Platina (1421–81) concerning allegations of (among other things) conspiracy against the pope, heresy, and paganism.[19] It appears that Cardinal Barbo helped secure the release of some of the supposed conspirators and even gained a reputation for being a patron of humanists. The cardinal was the acquaintance of such learned men as Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64), Theodore Gaza (1400–75), and Platina, and his secretary Antonio Calderini (d. 1494) was a friend of Ficino. Ficino writes to the cardinal: "Pythagoras and Plato composed a precious treasure vault of divine mysteries so great that they judged that it should be entrusted (*commendandum*) not to brittle sheets of paper but to eternal minds, and indeed in those minds deserving eternity. Thus they did not write down their greatest mysteries about the divine but taught them orally. I also recommend myself (*commendatum*) to you

to such an extent that it is not so much through trifling letters as through the serious minds and conversations of friends that I daily commend (*commendem*) myself to you."[20] In the letter, Ficino puns when asking for a recommendation by comparing it to the trust (*commendatus*) that Pythagoras and Plato placed in oral communication over the written word. In the late 1480s Ficino's work on Plato and the Neoplatonists had gained the attention of Rome. Writing to Cardinal Barbo and Calderini, Ficino was probably trying to reach out for support and patronage from the cardinal with the hope of mitigating any ecclesiastical suspicion toward his Platonic projects. The third book of his *De vita* might have sparked this specific controversy, since his Neoplatonic explanations for how one can draw influences from the heavens and achieve union with the divine had gained unfavorable scrutiny.[21] As the present book explains, Ficino challenged orthodoxy in two ways in particular. First, with the help of his ancient sources he delineated the goal of Platonism as humanity's divinization or deification, as famously phrased in Plato's *Theaetetus*: "We ought to try to escape from here to the divine as quickly as possible. This flight is to become like God as much as possible."[22] This belief formed Ficino's investigations into the nature of the soul, human identity, and virtue ethics, among other things. Rather than simply repeating a Christian understanding of man's creation in the image of God, Ficino often tested or overstepped the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy by studying daemonology, transfiguration, and the Incarnation, all directed by the Platonic objective of becoming divine. Second, his work on Plato also led him to reassess and reject many of the hermeneutical prejudices concerning the interpretation of Platonism that he and the medieval West largely inherited from Augustine (354–430 CE). Augustine too recognized that the goal of Platonism was happiness and union with the divine, but he denied that Platonists could reach their desired end.

Accompanying the letter to the cardinal was another to Calderini, in which Ficino explains that he was unable to travel to meet the cardinal in person because he was too busy working on Plotinus.[23] The letter informs us that at this time Ficino had completed the translation of Plotinus, and had written commentaries on twenty of the fifty-four tractates of the *Enneads*. Due to such burdensome work, Ficino asks Calderini to commend him to the cardinal repeatedly in person. In his request for a recommendation from a friend, Ficino finds another cue to employ playfully the traditional tropes, usually read from the *Phaedrus* and Plato's supposed *Second* and *Seventh Letters*, of Plato's and Pythagoras's esoteric distrust of the written word.[24] The two letters are evidence, first, of the manner in which Ficino employs the rhetoric of Platonic discussion and dialogue in an attempt to extend his cultural influence and,

second, of the high value that Ficino ascribes to face-to-face conversation. Lastly, in these letters Ficino reenacts the dramatic scene from the so-called *Second Letter* of Plato. In the *Second Letter* Plato purportedly defends himself and his writings to Dionysius II, the tyrant of Syracuse, dispatching a certain Archedemus to speak to the tyrant on his behalf, since, as Ficino repeats both in his letters to the cardinal and Calderini and in his *argumentum* to the *Second Letter*, Plato and Pythagoreans prefer to entrust their messages to minds (*animis commendatum*) rather than to paper. Despite his perilous situation, Ficino plays the director and assigns the roles in the drama. He casts himself as Plato, the cardinal (and perhaps even the papacy itself) plays the part of the tyrant of Syracuse, and Calderini has the role of Archedemus, speaking on behalf of Ficino to the curia. To complete the performance, one could even cast Ermolao Barbaro (1454–93) in the role of Archytas, since it was Barbaro who supposedly intervened to save Ficino from Rome's accusations, just as, according to tradition, Archytas supposedly rescued Plato from Dionysius II.

Shortly after sending these first missives Ficino felt the need to write another letter (dated 26 June 1487) to the cardinal to ingratiate himself, and once again to apologize for not meeting him in person.

> Fathers are ever in the habit of imprinting (*imprimere*) their image entirely onto their son so effectively that when one sees the child one will also see the parent. Indeed, I wish that something would now be given to me from the divine so that presently in mind I may produce (*procreem*) a letter so similar to me that when the letter arrives it will seem as if I came to you. Otherwise, I will be without a doubt irreverent unless I confer with my patron, who is suddenly now closer to me. If ever I wished for anything, thinking that it is possible, I now most ardently long for this. For only a book (*liber*), among all the works of art, is called, so to speak, with the name of children (*liberi*) or sons, because only a book gives birth to something most resembling its author, clearly more of a resemblance than a picture, since a picture only relates the shadowy figure of our masks (*personae*). Accordingly, Plotinus thinks that men themselves, that is, their minds, step onto the stage of this worldly tragedy (*tragoediam*) masked (*personatos*) with bodies. A book, however, expresses a man as a whole, insofar as it explains the mind as a whole. But where am I going with this? While I complete a letter that gradually resembles me, I am also producing its dissimilitude, for it will not be similar to the humble Marsilio if it

> raises its head any higher. Therefore, it is as a supplicant that now I commend myself to you.[25]

In this second letter to Cardinal Barbo, Ficino reverses his opinion in the first letter that a written document cannot replace conversation in person. Punning once again on books and children, he plays with the myth of the origins of letters from the *Phaedrus* and says that books can communicate something like a family resemblance between father and son. Ignoring Socrates' warnings that the written word, being unable to respond to criticism, needs its father to defend it, in the second letter to Cardinal Barbo Ficino says that the son, that is, the written word, can stand in and speak for the father in his absence. Books, Ficino argues with the double entendre of *imprimere* and *procreare*, have a figural relationship with their authors, just as children, it was thought, were imprinted with souls.[26] His ironic humility at the end of his Platonic letter, indicating that he refuses to visit the cardinal, is a nod to the long-lasting tradition, dating as far back as Augustine's accusations, that the Platonists are defined explicitly by their pride.[27]

The suspicion of his unorthodoxy and his inability to defend his written works personally in situ looms behind the Phaedrean trope of a child's need of its authorial father to defend it, and shows how a written persona can cause troubles for its author. His writings on occasion faced exactly the kind of violent interpretation described in the *Phaedrus*. Roughly a decade later, in 1495, his public reputation had survived these turbulent suspicions in Rome, only to be questioned in turn closer to home by the Dominican preacher and firebrand Savonarola (1452–98) and his acolytes in Florence. Seemingly conscious of his letters' role in defining and defending his identity for posterity, Ficino assembled them for the printer. On this occasion he continued the previous epistolary game in the dedicatory letter of his printed epistolography to the edition's financial backer, Girolamo Rossi. Ficino addresses the preface to his letters, personified as his children: "My letters, as often as you give greetings at my command to my friends, give immortal greetings as many times to your greatest friend, Girolamo Rossi. For I gave birth to you mortals and I know not by what fate you will die before long. Girolamo, however, a man distinguished in piety, gave birth to you again not long ago as I hope that you are now immortal."[28] Ficino consistently uses his epistles to form his public persona, but was this a presentation of his true identity or a witty game of self-disguise?

In Ficino's correspondence with Cardinal Barbo, in his argumentum to the *Second Letter*, and in his dedicatory letters to Lorenzo and Rossi, there is the same play of biological language as in Ficino's commentary on the *Phaedrus*.

"We should honor those [writers]," he says, "whose hope is to commend (*commendare*) the lawful offspring (*fetus*) of understanding, not to sheets of paper, but to souls, and to souls worthy of the mystery. These men suppose the use of writing a game (*ludus*)."[29] Ficino's constant use of puns in his prose emphasizes his Platonic opinion that a philosopher communicates serious matters (*studium*) in play (*ludus*). Yet, as Ficino's allusion to Plotinus's opinion that the world is a theater for tragedy makes clear, there is at times somber seriousness in Ficino's play.[30] If masks conceal the physical face, following Plotinus's logic of bodily masks, the physical face itself conceals one's true face: the mind or rational soul on which the divine is imprinted or inscribed. Masks and faces thus equally express and conceal identity, differences, and family resemblances. In Plotinus's understanding of the *Phaedrus*, one can become like a god by working, like a sculptor polishing a statue, on one's inner face (*prosopon*).[31] Ficino, who repeatedly worked on his own image in his writings, believed that Plato similarly fashioned his own countenance in his dialogues. This Platonic understanding of self-presentation also guides Ficino's interpretation of the dialogues.

Outline of the Book: Ficino, Plato, Humanism, and Platonic Traditions

The title of this book, *Plato's Persona*, conveys three related features of my argument. First, I argue that Ficino composes his letters and many of his other writings self-consciously in imitation of a Platonic style of prose, in effect devising a humanist rhetorical persona as a Platonic philosopher. Second, I propose that Ficino reads Plato in a prosopopoeic manner, that is, he seeks to understand the Athenian philosopher's persona(e) among all of the dialogues' interlocutors. Third, and related to the two previous points, I show how Ficino becomes Plato's Latin spokesperson in the Renaissance. It is a role which he cherishes and with which he fabricates his own identity.

The first chapter of this book is based on a study of the semantic fields stemming from the Greek *prosopon*, which means both mask and face, and is equally the term used to denote the interlocutors in Plato's dialogues. The anthropological differences and variances in meaning that come from the fact that prosopon has been translated by the Latin *persona* led to important developments for philosophy and rhetoric. This chapter delineates Ficino's understanding of Platonic personae (conceived as interlocutors in dialogues and as personal identities). It shows how the study by Ficino of Plato's artistry as a

writer of dialogues shaped his own style of prose and rhetorical persona in his humanistic letters. Studying the Platonic corpus or writing philosophical letters to his contemporaries, Ficino works with various rhetorical stratagems but most notably prosopopoeia and enargeia, the fabrication and presentation of vivid personae.

I devote the second chapter to Ficino's interpretation of Plato's dialogues as a coherent corpus. It is divided into four topics. First, I study how Plato's style and dialogues posed interpretive challenges to Ficino and other Renaissance humanists. Second, I examine the manuscript sources for his famous first translation of a corpus of ten dialogues (along with a preface and *argumenta*) that he gave to Cosimo de' Medici (1389–1464) as the elder statesman lay dying. Through manuscript evidence I establish Ficino's early reliance on Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica* for organizing this small corpus of Platonic dialogues into a philosophical order. Already at such an early stage in his career Ficino adopts Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic tendencies that will orient his later work, and delineates true happiness and the goal of Platonism as man's deification, divinization, or assimilation to the divine. Third, I discuss the sources for Ficino's understanding of the organization of the Platonic corpus, including the Middle Platonists Albinus (fl. c. second century CE) and Alcinous's (fl. c. second century CE) divisions of the corpus into dialogic characters. Finally, after demonstrating how Ficino adopts a tripartite division of dialogic characters (dialogues that refute sophists, dialogues that exhort youth, and dialogues that teach adults), I conclude by analyzing the ancient sources for the prosopopoeic interpretation of Plato's corpus and argue why it is essential for Ficino's Platonic project.

The following three chapters examine how Ficino employs a prosopopoeic interpretation of the corpus by identifying dialogues and passages where Plato speaks in particular voices. Chapter 3 is dedicated to Socrates, Chapter 4 to Pythagoreans, and Chapter 5 to Plato himself. Ficino cultivated his role as the gatekeeper to the Platonic tradition, and he liked to tell his readers that he had the task of being Plato's interpreter, teaching the Athenian foreigner in Italy how to speak Latin. Plato, for Ficino, played a similar role to that of Janus, since his writings were fundamentally doorways into the philosophy of two great predecessors who chose principally to communicate their thought orally: Pythagoras and Socrates. According to Ficino, therefore, Plato wrote in three principal prosopa or personae: his own persona, as Socrates, and as a Pythagorean. The dialogues' interlocutors are in other words mouths through which Plato can transcribe and communicate voices of philosophical traditions in order to record them in writing.

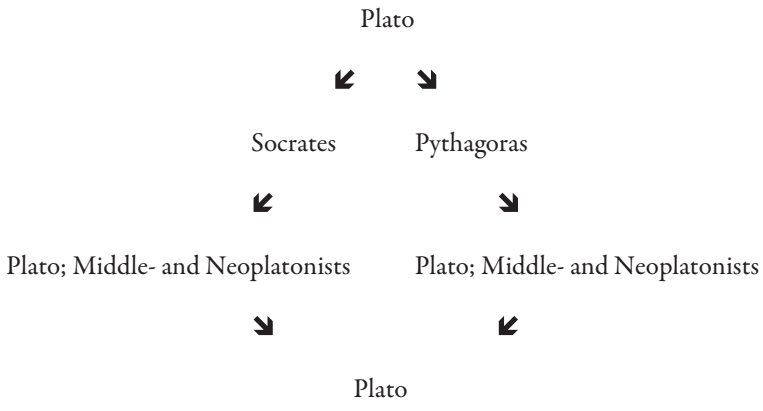

FIGURE 6. Diagram of Ficino's reading of Plato.

The reading of Plato that Ficino offers relies on his understanding of Socrates and Pythagoras, but since neither of them wrote—although there is pseudepigraphic material ascribed to Pythagoras that I discuss in Chapter 4—his interpretation of them in turn relies on Plato and later Platonic (principally Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic) sources, which themselves depend on Plato. This can be represented in a rudimentary diagram (Figure 6). There is therefore a central hermeneutic circle present in most of Ficino's interpretations. This diagrammatic structure, however, is, *sensu stricto*, too simplistic. Ficino's interpretation relies on a multiplicity of other Greek and Latin sources, such as Aristotle, Xenophon, Speusippus, Diogenes Laertius, Cicero, Quintilian, and Apuleius, to name a few, including also Christian ones, such as Augustine, Eusebius, and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (to keep the list short).

The theologian, biblical scholar, and Plato translator Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), whose writings have fundamentally shaped how we now conceive of the hermeneutic circle, sought to break through the circular reading of the Platonic corpus by proposing that an authentic Plato can be formed only from internal and direct sources. One ought to interpret the parts of the corpus in light of the whole, and the whole in light of the parts. Ficino was quite simply a bibliophile (or bibliomaniac) who read a vast number of works of various genres, which found their way into his exegesis of the Platonic corpus. Therefore, in order to describe more adequately the hermeneutic circle that I attributed to him above one would need to punctuate it on all sides with exegetical

influences from external and indirect sources—"contaminations" according to Schleiermacher's *sola scriptura* hermeneutics.[32]

Whether or not Ficino got Plato right by Schleiermacher's or present standards is not, however, of primary concern in the book. Rather the questions how and why Ficino interpreted Plato guide my work's historical approach toward its subject matter. The use of the dialogue form by Plato has often puzzled his interpreters. Modern developmentalists tend to smooth out the wrinkles of inconsistencies, if not outright contradictions, in the fabric of the different dialogues by dividing Plato's corpus into early, middle, and late periods.[33] Even if Ficino follows the ancient tradition of assuming that Plato wrote the *Phaedrus* first, as he also believes that Plato wrote the *Laws* last as an old man, and puts forward something like a developmental account of Plato's epistemology (which I examine in Chapter 3), his reading of the corpus would fall closer to what is now called a unitarian approach. Whereas developmentalists aim at arranging the differences in the dialogues into coherent stages of Plato's philosophical development, Ficino tries his hand early on at arranging a set of ten dialogues into a philosophical order. In general he discusses the differences in Plato's dialogues in terms of the philosopher's polyphony or symphony of voices. Ficino's Plato speaks in different registers and adopts various personae for different purposes.

My book examines Ficino's appropriation of Plato and Platonisms to form a Plato, who in turn becomes the primary Plato of the Italian (and later) European Renaissance. The book adopts the hermeneutical strategy of following Ficino's own prescriptive hermeneutics of dividing the Platonic corpus into three primary personae—Socratic, Pythagorean, and Platonic—and studies the historical effect of this approach on the formation of Ficino's Platonism. It analyses the specific sources for Ficino's hermeneutics and does not shy away from pointing out the limits of his schema, identifying moments where Ficino strays from his own route. The structure of Chapters 3, 4, and 5 follows Ficino's map, but the reader should bear in mind that the parameters of Socratic, Pythagorean, and Platonic personae are at times nothing more than a heuristic roadmap even for Ficino.

It is not my aim to convince the reader to adopt any particular Ficinian interpretation of Plato. Just as scholars of Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) would presumably not try to convince present-day students to follow him in rejecting the *Laws* as a completely spurious dialogue, so I have no intention of persuading the reader to adopt Ficino's opinion that Plato wrote the *Laws* in his own persona (the Athenian Stranger) but the *Republic* in Pythagorean personae. Today

the *Republic* is certainly one of the most popular works assigned in university classrooms. The *Laws* by contrast are normally studied only by more advanced students of Plato. Given the centrality of the *Republic* and the peripheral place of the *Laws* to many modern understandings of Plato, Ficino's interpretation might appear at first glance odd or simply wrong. Yet a few recent interpreters, like Ficino, have identified of the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* as Plato, albeit for different reasons.[34] The *Republic* has a central role in Ficino's interpretation of Plato, but often for reasons alien to Plato scholars today. Simply stated, the supposed Pythagorean dimensions in the *Republic* and in Plato's works as a whole take on an importance for Ficino rarely found today.

Beyond this historical interest, Ficino's reading of the Platonic corpus through a series of personae may have the salutary effect of distancing and destabilizing our own hermeneutical prejudices towards the Platonic corpus. They force us to think about our own interpretation of Plato in the *longue durée* of Plato interpretations.[35] Renaissance philosophy has long endured the disparagements of eclecticism, syncretism, and lack of system that has been flung in its direction on occasion since the time of Johann Jakob Brucker (1696–1770).[36] In certain respects there is a way in which Ficino's Plato is more familiar to present readers than some ancient traditions of Platonism. On the one hand, we possess much more of Ficino's writings than the fragmentary works of some Academic or Middle Platonists. With Ficino we are even better off than with most Neoplatonists for whom we still have many of their voluminous commentaries. Yet, on the other hand, Ficino stands at a point of convergence of many of these older interpretive traditions. To understand Ficino's Plato, therefore, one needs to study both Ficino's writings and the ancient interpretations of Plato that he appropriates.

Ficino's Platonism is interesting precisely because he values Platonic traditions. As I argue at the end of this book, it is specifically the question of tradition that sets him apart from most interpretations of Plato inherited from Schleiermacher that were, until very recently, completely dominant. But there is at present a return—and a strong one at that—to studying philosophical traditions. The fields of Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism are more fruitful now than they have ever been. Similarly, to take another example, the study of late ancient Aristotelian commentaries is now much more advanced than a generation ago. For too long and primarily because of questions of canon formation in the nineteenth century, the study of Renaissance philosophy and intellectual history has suffered the same fate as that of late antiquity: marginalization.[37] A reappraisal of Ficino's reading of Plato—a reading in which traditions of Platonic

interpretations form a bedrock to his hermeneutics—promises to contribute to the project of rereading Plato in traditions of interpretation.[38]

Ficino's Plato is also important insofar as he wrestles with the dominant hermeneutical framework of Augustine that he inherited. I am not the first to note Ficino's engagement with Augustine. Some, for instance, have written that Ficino is simply Augustinian in his approach to Plato. If there is a lot of Augustine in Ficino's thinking it is because the bishop is always on the horizon. As Ficino was a Catholic priest and theologian invested in Platonism, it would be a surprise if it were otherwise.[39] More broadly, it is also the case that Christianity is almost always present, even if only in the background, in Ficino's interpretation of Plato. But it is to his great credit that Ficino attempts to untangle Plato and Platonic traditions from Augustine's hermeneutics, even as he employs it frequently. It is in no small measure because of the critical impact of Platonism on Augustine's own thinking that the study of Plato and Platonists was neglected, diminished, or subsumed under different goals in the Latin West (I do not wish to pronounce on the Byzantine and Islamic worlds, where Augustine exercised no such power). Why learn virtue from Socrates if, as Augustine believes, the ancient pagan virtues were not real virtues at all? I explain Ficino's answer in Chapter 3. Although Ficino does not avow any kind of paganism, I will argue that he defends Socratic virtue forcefully by writing the *De amore* in the authorial voice of a Platonist qua pagan. Why study Plato if he does not have revealed truth? For Augustine he is valuable only if a reader pillages him for his philosophical treasures in the manner of the Israelites stealing from the Egyptians. Such Augustinian hermeneutics in effect converts and appropriates central Platonic doctrines to Christian theology and discards what remains of Platonic writings.[40] Augustine's attitude marginalizes Platonism as a whole even as he makes his study of the "books of the Platonists" the crucial propaedeutic for his conversion to Christianity. For Augustine, Platonism might begin to steer one in the right direction, but if one persists as a Platonist one will remain adrift in Platonism, to use his metaphor of the *nostos* (also favored by Plotinus), or, worse, one will sink under its waves or will wreck on its reefs and will never reach the true fatherland.[41]

Augustine paradoxically succeeded in marginalizing the texts of Plato and the Platonists for the Middle Ages, even despite or more accurately because of his own debt to Platonic traditions. Nor were Platonic traditions any more successful than Plato: Plotinus was not read in the Middle Ages perhaps simply because his philosophy was thought to have been superseded by Christian theology. Indeed, small but significant portions of his and Proclus's philosophies

were read extensively (and even became part of the Faculty of Arts curriculum at the University of Paris in 1255) in the Latin translation of a ninth-century Arabic collection of reworked paraphrases, known in Latin as the *Liber de causis*. Yet this work is stripped of all explicit references identifying it with Plotinus or Proclus. Porphyry's introduction to logic, the *Isagoge*, was safe enough to read in scholastic classrooms as a preparation for Aristotle's *Organon*, but the bulk of Porphyry's philosophical writings (the *Sententiae* and the *De abstinentia*, for example) were not. Porphyry was of course preceded by his reputation. Since the Christian emperors Valentinian III and Theodosius II ordered that all copies of his *Contra Christianos* be burned, his polemics against Christianity survive only in fragments in the writings of church fathers who sought to refute him. As for Proclus, despite having a very large influence on scholasticism primarily through the *Liber de causis*, William of Moerbeke's († before 1286) translations of the *Elements of Theology* and *On Providence and Fate*, a partial anonymous translation of the *Elements of Physics*, and the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (fl. c. late fifth or early sixth century CE), he too held a tenuous position.[42] Medieval philosophers and theologians suspected his paganism and read neither his commentaries on Plato nor his *Platonic Theology*. Most other later Platonists (Iamblichus, Olympiodorus, Hermias, et al.) seem to have been ignored. However, the underground rivers of Platonism that watered the writings of Christian theologians and philosophers from late antiquity into the Middle Ages—often without their knowledge—fed into Ficino's writings. Ficino tapped into the implicit Platonic sources of many Christian writings to irrigate the grounds of his explicitly Platonic projects.

Regardless of his role as a reviver of Platonism, I view his work in continuity with the previous centuries of medieval thought. This is evident from the fact that he is a dedicated reader of such authorities as Boethius (c. 475/7–c. 526 CE), Aquinas (1225–74), and especially Pseudo-Dionysius and that he completed his first translations of Platonic works, probably Proclus's *Elements of Theology* and *Elements of Physics*, in a thoroughly scholastic context.[43] Indeed, it is because so much Platonism and Neoplatonism forms part of the very fabric of various traditions of Christian theology—and not only because of Augustine—that Ficino is able to bring it to life. What distinguishes him from his predecessors is that he greatly expands the canon of Platonic works at an incredible pace—Plato's complete corpus, Plotinus's *Enneads*, as well as much of what survives of Alcinous, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus, to name the most obvious. With new sources come new perspectives. As a prime example, Pseudo-Dionysius was an authority both to Ficino and his predecessors, but in Ficino's hands he takes on

even greater importance specifically as a Platonic authority. In his commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius, Ficino draws on Plato, Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus in ways that would have been impossible for writers of earlier generations. He still accepted the apocryphal conversion narrative that Pseudo-Dionysius was Paul of Tarsus's first convert (Acts 17: 34), and therefore he reversed the chronological order of influence by hypothesizing him as a source for later Platonic writers, but his ability to draw on previous Platonists while reading Pseudo-Dionysius permitted him to comment on the complex affinities and differences of their respective Platonisms.[44] Ficino is immersed in Augustine, but by pulling the writings of Platonic castaways out of neglect, and by helping them reach safe harbors, he incrementally emancipated Platonism from Augustine's interpretation, and while it was never his desire to dislodge Plato and the Platonists from Christianity's orbit, he succeeded in giving them a self-autonomy unimaginable to Augustine.

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CHAPTER 1

Prosopon/Persona

Philosophy and Rhetoric

> But meanwhile closely inspect what hides under the mask (*sub persona lateat*). You will say, am I not contemplating youthful features instead of Marsilio's face (*vultus*)?
>
> —Marsilio Ficino, letter to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, 1488

Prosopa and Personae: Of Masks, Faces, and Persons

It is a commonplace in Renaissance scholarship to speak about the rediscovery of the dialogue genre. Why, then, did Marsilio Ficino, the Renaissance's greatest student of the Platonic dialogue, write so few dialogues himself? Instead of concluding too quickly that he was too dogmatic, systematic, or insensitive to the dialogic nature of Plato as well as to stylistic questions of philosophical prose, and therefore not of the same ilk as his humanist contemporaries who were immersed in the dialogic form of Cicero's (106–43 BCE) writings, one ought to examine how Ficino understood Plato's use of interlocutors (prosopa/personae).[1] Such a study reveals that at the same time as his contemporaries were studying and imitating the Ciceronian concept of the rhetorical persona, Ficino was busy studying the Platonic one and imitating it as his own written persona. A comparison of Ficino's letters with three famous epistolary debates over Ciceronianism and humanist Latin will make this clear. I will argue that Ficino is in fact deeply invested in questions about personae, in terms of both Platonic prosopopoeia and Ciceronian rhetorical personae. Like his fellow humanists Ficino employed the epistolary form to fabricate his own discursive rhetorical persona,

yet in his case he worked at being known as *the* public spokesperson for Plato. Just as investigations into the rhetorical imitation of past and silent voices (especially Cicero's) lead some humanists to question how someone's discursive oratorical persona relates to their prediscursive person, so Ficino's preoccupation with Platonic style and dialogic characters also helped shape his epistolary style and person. The examples I study below do not show Ficino in the ongoing Ciceronian controversies, debating the merit of imitating an ancient style and rhetorical persona; instead they reveal him in the process of crafting a rhetorical mask for philosophical purposes.

The Greeks had four words for masks: *gorgoneion, mormolukeion, prosopon*, and *prosopeion*. The first, as the name clearly indicates, denotes the mask of the Gorgons, three nightmarish sisters with snakes for hair, whom Plato evokes in the *Symposium* (198a–199b) to describe Agathon's speech as an imitation of Gorgias's style, whose long discourses, rhetorical figures, and public exhibitions would petrify his listeners, or render them speechless. Plato there plays with the reduplicative sound of *Gor*gias/*Gor*gon, and *Gorgon* itself derives from the word *gorgos*, whose meaning "grim" or "terrible" is reinforced again by the reduplication of the sound of "g" with the growling "gor," or "gar" as it is also in the names of Rabelais's giants Gargantua and Gargamelle. Plato's description of Gorgias's rhetoric as a frightful disguise woven in words points to the related fearful mask: the mormolukeion. The word itself derives from *mormo*, a fearsome female monster or a bugbear whose very name was shouted at children to frighten them (often translated as *lamia* and *larva* in Latin). Plato famously invokes the mormolukeion in the *Phaedo*, where, in a philosophical image that had a lasting impact on Lucian, Epictetus, Plutarch, and others, he presents Socrates as the philosophical magus who dispels the fear of death as one dispels a child's fear of a terrifying mask by turning it upside down to show that it is merely a plaything that is empty on the reverse.[2] The mask of the mormolukeion found a later audience in the visual arts of the ancient Romans (often on sarcophagi) and later in the Italian Renaissance, where youthful putti spooked each other while wearing larva masks (Figure 7).[3] As will be seen, in the Renaissance this kind of larva mask often had Platonic connotations. Finally, the related prosopon and prosopeion are by far the most common words for mask in ancient Greek. The latter, however, is derived from the former and only came into use in the third century BCE. The word *prosopon* is used to denote all forms of masks, including theatrical, religious, ritualistic masks, the two types previously mentioned, as well as the interlocutors in Plato's dialogues. Most important, the Greeks also used the word *prosopon* to denote faces as well as masks.

FIGURE 7. *Putti Playing with Masks*, attributed to Girolamo Mocetto, after Mantegna, pen and ink on paper, c. 1485–95. Louvre, Paris, inv. 5072, nouveau 2854 (Martineau, 1992, cat. 149).

There is therefore an important anthropological difference to be noted between the Greeks and Romans that bears philosophical significance for Platonism. Unlike the Romans and moderns who distinguish between a mask (*persona*) and a face (*os*, *vultus*, and *facies*), the early Greeks did not make such a clear distinction. There is no duplicity, dissimilitude, or deceit in masks for the early Greeks. Rather, masks present and embody. As the prefix *pros* indicates, for the Greeks, the prosopon, the mask and the face, is literally that which is seen in front or facing something. Instead of this Greek visual etymology, Aulus Gellius (c. 125–180 CE, or later) records the Roman understanding of persona according to an auditory etymology, *per-sonare*, as that through which a voice resounds (a spokesperson or megaphone), and therefore something placed over the face.[4] Beginning with Polybius (264–146 BCE) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (c. 60–7 BCE, or later) we can detect that the influence of the Latin persona began to be felt on the Greek prosopeion, which came to be used for a mask concealing the face. The distance from the early Greeks is evident. Their masks display, while the Romans' and ours conceal. Classicists have studied and documented this problem carefully, replacing the old etymology of persona that offers a sonorous and phonetic derivation with the modern etymology derived from the darkness of infernal regions of the obscure Etruscan demon Phersu. Both cases, either sounds or shadows, deny sight and a visible presence.[5]

Plato's Prosopon and the Greeks

Boethius's often repeated reputation as the last Roman and the first medieval philosopher may have its roots in the desire of Lorenzo Valla (1407–57) to expose his stylistic barbarisms, but there is nevertheless some sense in seeing him on one side of the intersection of Greek Platonism and Latin philosophy, and seeing Renaissance Hellenism on the other. Already in the sixth century Boethius made the distinction between the phonetic etymology of the Latin persona and the visual etymology of the Greek prosopon, and corrected the former with the latter. According to Boethius's visual etymology, however, instead of being what stands open and visible in front of the face, the prosopon becomes what is placed on top of the face, and therefore what covers it: a mask.[6] Hence, despite switching out the Roman auditory meaning for a visual one, Boethius makes the Greek prosopon function like the Latin persona: it conceals. Yet Boethius is not simply applying a Latin understanding of the etymology of persona to the Greek prosopon; in fact he follows the logic of Plato's prosopon all too closely.

As was often the case, Plato bucked the trends, traditions, received assumptions, and epistemic status quo of his age. As the example of the mask of the mormolukeion in the *Phaedo* illustrates, for Plato the prosopon can in fact deceive. Concerned with the moral and societal impact of poetic impiety, Socrates proposes in book 2 of the *Republic* that lawmakers ought to establish guiding myths to counter three Homeric offenses against the gods: the statement by one of the suitors in the *Odyssey* that gods travel among men in disguise (*Resp.* 381d), the "falsehoods about Proteus and Thetis," and the false dream sent by Zeus to Agamemnon in the *Iliad* (*Resp.* 383a).[7] These passages imply three problems: that the gods deceive men, are mutable, and are somehow responsible for evil. Socrates and Adeimantus agree that the most perfect form of anything cannot admit change and alteration. Even the gods cannot alter themselves. After disparaging the poets for lying about Proteus, Socrates turns on mothers who scare their children by speaking evil of the gods in nursery tales. Finally Socrates says: "May we suppose that while the gods themselves are incapable of change they cause us to fancy that they appear in many shapes deceiving and practicing magic upon us?"[8] In book 3 of the *Republic*, Socrates continues his critique and censures Homer for concealing himself behind his characters, Chryses for example, by imitating another in speech and manner (ἢ κατὰ φωνὴν ἢ κατὰ σχῆμα).[9] Socrates' criticism is directed against Homer's use of prosopopoeia, that is, the adoption of different mimetic figurative prosopa or personae for speeches in his diegetic tale. Socrates' focus on the imitation of speech and figure reveals how his critique of Homer extends more broadly into poetry's realm of performative and theatrical imitation. At its best, the ability to imitate another's voice and appearance is the work of a Protean poet capable of personifying all, from shameful drunks to the gods themselves.[10] Yet one does not need to stray from this way of thinking to see how one can direct the same criticism at Plato's own personifications and polyphonic dialogues. The Athenian philosopher's dialogic imitations are therefore in public competition with other forms of education.

The *Gorgias*'s narrative framework clearly shows how Plato publicly stages an agonistic competition between Socrates' philosophy and Gorgias's rhetoric. The fearsome and formidable Callicles brings this clash of disciplines to life by embodying the rhetorician's use of epic poetry, tragedy, and even philosophy to make his speech:

> It is a good thing to engage in philosophy just so far as it is an aid to education, and it is no disgrace for a youth to study it, but when a

> man who is now growing older still studies philosophy, the situation becomes ridiculous, Socrates, and I feel toward philosophers very much as I do toward those who lisp and play the child. When I see a little child, for whom it is still proper enough (πρέπον) to speak in this way, lisping and playing, I like it and it seems to me pretty and ingenuous and appropriate to the child's age, and when I hear it talking with precision, it seems to me disagreeable and it vexes my ears and appears to me more fitting for a slave, but when one hears a grown man lisping and sees him playing the child, it looks ridiculous and unmanly and worthy of a beating. I feel exactly the same too about students of philosophy. When I see a youth engaged in it, I admire it and it seems to me natural and I consider such a man ingenuous, and the man who does not pursue it I regard as illiberal and one who will never aspire to any fine and noble deed, but when I see an older man still studying philosophy and not deserting it, that man, Socrates, is actually asking for a whipping. . . . Now I am quite friendly disposed toward you, Socrates, and I suppose I feel much as Zethus, whom I mentioned, felt toward Amphion in Euripides. For I am moved to say to you the same kind of thing as he said to his brother, "You neglect, Socrates, what you most ought to care for, and pervert a naturally noble spirit by putting on a childlike semblance, and you could neither contribute a useful word in the councils of justice nor seize upon what is plausible and convincing, nor offer any brilliant advice on another's behalf."[11]

In this passage Callicles, claiming that Socrates will be like a child unable to defend himself, speaks proleptically about Socrates' looming trial in Athens. Yet even more than a personal reference to Socrates' fate, Callicles' argument seeks to establish philosophy's proper boundaries within the polis' conventions and decorum (πρέπον). Its pedagogical curriculum should reinforce these boundaries, not transgress them. Old philosophers, he relates, in their ridiculous insistence on playing the part of children break decorum and invert their own nature. To make his case before the crowd, Callicles draws on what were probably commonplace anecdotes. First, a reference to Phoenix's reproving speech to his former ward Achilles (*Iliad* 9.441) for his childish brooding and for his tendency to isolate himself from the other troops reinforces Callicles' argument about decorum: that one earns distinction among the company of men with the business of politics in the agora, rather than secluded away in contemplation. One hears

echoes of this debate in Socrates' courtroom defence against the accusations of Meletus and the general slander of public opinion when Socrates compares his willingness to die for his just way of life to Achilles' fearless choice to avenge Patroclus and face death.[12]

Second, the quotation from Euripides' lost *Antiope* casts Socrates in the role of Amphion and Callicles in the role of Zethus once more in order to reinforce Callicles' agon between philosophical leisure (ἀπραγμοσύνη) and political activity (πολυπραγμοσύνη). The two brothers from Euripides' *Antiope* came to represent for the ancients the contest of disciplines, with Zethus standing for the practical life of business and politics and Amphion for the contemplative life of music and philosophy.[13] In the fifteenth century the *Gorgias*'s staging of the myth of Amphion as a dramatic contest between the contemplative life of Socrates and the active life of the busybody politician fascinated Marsilio Ficino, who recast the two brothers as personifications for Renaissance debates between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. He compared, for instance, Amphion's philosophical music to Orpheus, the Dionysiac poet Arion, the lyre-playing Pythagoras, Empedocles, and even the aged Socrates, and he was also in the habit of calling his friend Cristoforo Landino (1424–98), the Platonically inspired poet, humanist, scholar, and philosopher, by the name Amphion.[14]

The *Gorgias* also stages an agon between dialogue and theater as forms of public education. Far from failing to realize that Socrates' criticism of poetry's prosopopoeic abilities in the *Republic* could be turned on his own dialogue form, Plato must have been acutely aware of the imitative and figurative implications of his dialogic personifications. Socrates often relates, as he does in the *Gorgias*, for example, that he would be useless in the public assembly—unlike the roars of the roaming lions Thrasymachus and Callicles or the frightful magic of Gorgias—since he is incapable of adopting the various rhetorical personae used to deliver different long speeches in courts and the agora. Philosophy, it seems, fails to meet the exigencies of varying public circumstances. In fact, such speeches, Plato warns semi-playfully in the *Symposium*, are capable of stealing the capacity of speech from others. Faced with the task of following Agathon's speech in praise of love, Socrates compares his fellow symposiast to Gorgias: "For his speech so reminded me of Gorgias that I was exactly in the plight described by Homer: I feared that Agathon in his final phrases would confront me with the eloquent Gorgias' head, and by opposing his speech to mine would turn me thus dumbfounded into stone."[15] With his playful pun on Gorgias/Gorgon, and more precisely in comparing Gorgias's speech to the Gorgon's face, Plato invokes the semantic range of the masks of the Gorgon and the

mormolukeion. In seeing a likeness between Agathon's speech and Gorgias's rhetorical style, which he reinforces in producing word associations between head and peroration, Socrates in effect tells his audience that Agathon is covering himself with Gorgias's prosopon (mask-face) to deliver his praise of love. So forceful is his delivery, Socrates jests, that he is almost dumbfounded into silence and petrified into stone.

Like Perseus cutting off the head of Medusa, however, and just like the inversion of the mask of the mormolukeion in the *Phaedo*, Socrates' discourse, which includes a long prosopopoeic personification of Diotima, overturns Agathon's speech. In alluding to Gorgias/Gorgon in the *Symposium* Plato deploys rhetorical synaesthesia; Gorgias's art is sonorous, reverberating the oral pronunciation of *gorgos*, but the force of the Gorgon's face as a source of petrification and death is visual. The Gorgon is something visible that is not permitted to be seen, only heard. In speaking Agathon places the persona of Gorgias before the symposiasts' eyes. The end result of the synesthesia of Gorgias/Gorgon is silence and lack of life: the exact opposite of Amphion's and Orpheus's musical voices, which were capable of enlivening stones. Like ancient visual depictions of Dionysus and the Gorgon, the rhetorician's mask is also a frontal face. It stands before the crowd listening and staring in silence, unable to ask questions and converse in return. In its place, Plato confronts this form of discourse by proposing face-to-face dialogue as the central feature of philosophical communication. In doing so he revaluates the prosopon and the person.

Instead of seeing only the outer surface of the speech, Plato tells us that one can find concealed behind the public display—behind the prosopon—either nothing or mind, soul, and logos. On the one hand, dialogue for Plato is the external rationalization through language of common meanings, but on the other, it is also the characteristic form of internal thought. The first understanding of dialogue is characteristic of the Socratic elenchus, the second of Platonic dialectic. The *Sophist*, the dialogue between Socrates (who plays a minor role), Theodorus, Theaetetus, and the Eleatic Stranger, a disciple of Parmenides and Zeno (*Sophist* 216a1–4), explains the analogy of the discursive structure of thought to dialogue:

> *Stranger:* Well, thinking (διάνοια) and discourse (λόγος) are the same thing, except that what we call thinking is, precisely, the inward dialogue carried on by the mind with itself without spoken sound.
>
> . . .

> *Stranger:* Well then, since we have seen that there is true and false statement, and of these mental processes we have found thinking to be a dialogue of the mind with itself, and judgment to be the conclusion of thinking, and what we mean by "it appears" (φαίνεται) a blend of perception and judgment, it follows that these also, being of the same nature as statement (τούτων τῷ λόγῳ συγγενῶν ὄντων), must be, some of them and on some occasions, false.[16]

In fact, Plato makes the Eleatic Stranger agree with what Socrates said on the previous day (when the Stranger was not present) in the *Theaetetus*, which Plato stages the day before the *Sophist*. For there too Socrates interiorizes the logos, explaining discursive thinking as the soul conversing with itself.[17]

The *Theaetetus* warrants a pause, since the dialogue, which is often characterized as Plato's investigation into epistemological theories of knowledge, does not in fact begin with the question "What is knowledge?" as one often hears but begins with the inquiry into whether or not Socrates and the younger Theaetetus resemble one another:

> *Theodorus:* Yes, Socrates. I have met with a youth of this city who certainly deserves mention, and you will find it worthwhile to hear me describe him. If he were handsome, I should be afraid to use strong terms, lest I should be suspected of being in love with him. However, he is not handsome, but—forgive my saying so—he resembles you in being snub-nosed (σιμότης) and having prominent eyes, though these features are less marked in him. So I can speak without fear. I assure you that, among all the young men I have met with—and I have had to do with a good many—I have never found such admirable gifts. The combination of a rare quickness of intelligence with exceptional gentleness and of an incomparably virile spirit with both, is a thing that I should hardly have believed could exist, and I have never seen it before. . . .
>
> *Socrates:* You give him a noble character. Please ask him to come and sit down with us.
>
> *Theodorus:* I will. Theaetetus, come this way and sit by Socrates.
>
> *Socrates:* Yes, do, Theaetetus, so that I may study the character of my own countenance (τὸ πρόσωπον), for Theodorus tells me it is like yours. Now, suppose we each had a lyre, and Theodorus said they

were both tuned to the same pitch, should we take his word at once, or should we try to find out whether he was a musician?

Theaetetus: We should try to find that out.

Socrates: And now, if this alleged likeness of our faces is a matter of any interest to us, we must ask whether it is a skilled draftsman who informs us of it.[18]

Plato's memorable visual depiction of Socrates' face is not simply decorative literary embellishment. Following various investigations into the nature of knowledge, the *Theaetetus* concludes with another bookended comparison of Socrates' and Theaetetus's faces. At this end point in the dialogue, the discussion has reached the following explanation for knowledge: if knowledge requires having a true belief with an account (λόγος), to provide such an account one needs to grasp the ways in which two things resemble one another, not only by way of what they have in common (τῶν κοινῶν) but also by their difference (διαφορότης). Yet even Socrates' reasoning here leads to aporia, since it proposes a circular definition of knowledge: knowledge is true belief accompanied by an account, which is understood as knowledge of a thing's commonalities and differences. The example that Socrates puts forward is once again the comparison of his snub-nosed face with Theaetetus's snub-nosedness.[19] In fact, the dialogic structure of the *Theaetetus* presents a similar aporia to the one Aristotle undertakes in book zeta of the *Metaphysics*, where he seeks to determine the essence of a thing according to a definition (ὁρισμὸς) with an added account (λόγος). It is no coincidence that Aristotle there uses the example of a snub nose (σιμότης), as he does elsewhere (*De anima* 3.7, and in the *Categories*, for instance). One can speculate whether Aristotle learned to employ examples like the comparison of Socrates' and Theaetetus's prosopa from Plato's Academy. If so, such examples would stand behind the tradition in philosophical writing that seems to begin with Aristotle of using Socrates as an example of a particular man to argue *per speciem*—an example that even modern undergraduates hear all too often during their first (often tedious) encounter with syllogisms in the classroom, which typically begin with the first premise: "Socrates is a man."

The *Theaetetus* thus provides an account of how one can attain self-knowledge through dialogue with another. Yet Plato's Socratic conversations are not just between faces that share common ugly, snub-nosed, or even monstrous traits, as Nietzsche characterized Socrates' appearance.[20] The beautiful countenances of some of Socrates' interlocutors—Alcibiades, Phaedrus, Charmides—equally mark outer differences. As the *Phaedrus* (255a–e) reminds us,

the face is often the site of physical beauty, with the eyes being the most immediately acute of all senses through which the effluences of beauty, the visual *eidola*, are emitted and received. Thus the face-to-face dialogue also serves Plato's metaphysics of presence; the prosopon becomes the medium through which one can arrive at and communicate truth, beauty, and goodness. The *Republic*'s cave myth reinforces this conclusion. Plato, one will remember, argued that the human condition is akin to prisoners who are not blind but who are only able to look forward toward shadows cast on a wall, that is, they are unable to turn their heads either to look behind them or to converse with each other face to face.[21] The shadows in the cave remain shadows for the prisoners so long as they are unable to converse with one another face to face. The sight of each other's countenance would serve as an illuminating lamp, so to speak, by which they could reveal shadows as shadows and begin to name the real objects. The prisoners are unable to turn their heads in the right direction.

Hence for Plato prosopon is closely related to *prosrhesis* (πρόσρησις): the act of identifying and naming something by way of identity and difference, as well as the act of turning the head toward someone to address him or her in speech. The *Timaeus* thus gives an explanation for the prosopon that agrees with intellection: "And as the gods hold that the front is more honourable and commanding than the back, they made us move, for the most part, forwards. So it was necessary to distinguish the front of man's body and make it different from the back; and to do this they placed the face (πρόσωπον) on this side of the sphere of the head, and fixed in it organs for the soul's forethought (ψυχῆς προνοίᾳ), and arranged that this our natural front should take the lead."[22] Agreeing with its etymology, the prosopon is turned toward the front to favor the gods and is bestowed with eyes as organs for the soul's divinatory foreknowledge and foresight. Face-to-face conversation among humans becomes a propaedeutic for dialogue with the divine. Given the *Theaetetus*'s face-to-face comparison of Socrates and Theaetetus, the famous digression at 176a–c that one ought to become like God as much as possible (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν) perhaps ought to be interpreted to say that philosophical conversation prepares one to converse soul to soul, and internally soul to divine.

It is therefore with Plato that the singularity of prosopon (face)-prosopon (mask) begins to separate. The prosopon is no longer a simple presentation of the true individual, since the principle of unification that makes one a singular individual is interiorized. Plato thus refuses to identify the self with the external face in the *Alcibiades*: "When Socrates converses with Alcibiades through words, he isn't addressing your face (πρόσωπον), it seems, but Alcibiades, that is

your soul (ψυχή)."[23] With Plato the interiority of the prosopon is distinguished from its outer nature. The outer prosopon (face) begins to conceal, as masks do for many moderns, an inner self or an interior (soul). Hence the context is now clear for the well-known image from the *Phaedo*. The mormolukeion becomes the image of the soul's inversion. It can be turned over to reveal its reverse side empty of spirit and soul. Thus if Socrates tells Alcibiades that he does not want to converse merely with his face but with his soul, Alcibiades, for his part, famously describes Socrates as Silenus, a follower of Dionysus whose ugly exterior covered interior divine treasures. In other words, Socrates' face is a type of mormolukeion covering an inner divinity.

Therefore, although Plato interiorizes the person he also reasons that self-knowledge is reached through discursive processes, first, in conversation with another and, second, in an inner conversation with the self. It is important to know that these two conversations are not incommensurable. In the *Sophist* (263e–264b) Plato writes that they are part of a common family or kind (τούτων τῷ λόγῳ συγγενῶν ὄντων). What comes to light or appears both in face-to-face conversation with another and in the interior conversation of thinking and self-examination are part of the same discursive phenomenology of self-knowledge.[24] Plato, therefore, begins to delineate the field of truth by claiming that contradictions that emerge in conversation with another also hold when thinking with oneself. This search for internal contradictions frames a central question in Platonic self-knowledge: whether the self-examination of one's interior discursive person (what one thinks one is) leads to a prior prediscursive person (what one actually is). For later followers of Plato, like Plotinus, the soul is the phenomenon of discursivity itself: the first principle of motion that originates the temporal processes and movements of reasoning.[25] Plato's argument that thought takes the form of discursive internal conversation raises the question whether self-knowledge consists simply of a series of successive internal self-presentations (which would be equivalent to donning various internal masks corresponding to each successive state of self-consciousness) or whether self-knowledge leads to something prior to the successive states of soul, which would be the prediscursive core of one's identity.

Platonic Colors: Ancient and Renaissance Rhetoric

If the force of Platonism turns us toward an inner persona, after Plato it is left to the rhetorical traditions of subsequent times to confront the discursive persona

of external public speech. Even in rhetorical theory—equally among the ancients as in the Renaissance—one feels Plato's attempt to distinguish discursive and prediscursive identities.

In the *Gorgias* Socrates resists classifying rhetoric as a *techne*, preferring instead to call it a knack (ἐμπειρία). He thereby establishes the analogy that rhetoric impersonates (ὑπόκειται) philosophy, just as cooking impersonates medicine.[26] Aristotle must have learned much from Plato about this matter, for he addresses the same question in his *Rhetoric* and gives a different answer while nonetheless following a logic similar to his teacher's. His work begins: "Rhetoric is a counterpart of dialectic; for both have to do with matters that are in a manner common (ἅ κοινά) for the cognizance of all men and not confined to any special science."[27] He continues by stating that since rhetoric, like dialectic, does not deal with a particular class of subjects but argues about what is common, it must be able to persuade opposites.[28] Like dialectic, one should add, rhetoric is also discursive. Already one notices that rhetoric for Aristotle is concerned with the instrumentalization of techniques for persuading others; in Plato's terms, it deals with seeming. Likewise, it is with Aristotle's analysis of character (ἦθος) that one notices how much he, like Plato, understands rhetoric as the construction of a discursive persona put on display in the public sphere: "The orator persuades by moral character (ἤθους) when his speech is delivered in such a manner as to render him worthy of confidence; for we feel confidence in a greater degree and more readily in persons of worth in regard to everything in general, but where there is no certainty and there is room for doubt, our confidence is absolute. But this confidence must be due to the speech itself, not to any preconceived idea of the speaker's character."[29] Isocrates had postulated that in order for a speech to persuade there ought to be a correspondence between the orator's speech (λόγος) and character (ἦθος). But for Aristotle, it is not the character of the prediscursive person that moves the members of his audience to emotion (πάθος) and persuades (πείθω; πιθανός) them to act. What matters for achieving these ends is the speech (λόγος), its style (λέξις), and the delivery or interpretation of the oratorical performance (ὑπόκρισς). Rhetoric is therefore the way in which one can discover these techniques of persuasion in order to perform them on the public stage. The sum total of these parts, when spoken and acted (including oratorical gestures, expressions, timing, and so on) assembles the orator's traits and words into a discursive character.

Whereas in Athens speech was not so much a right as an obligation (and in Socrates' case a mortal necessity), in Rome speech was reserved for privileged individuals who were legitimized for and recognized by public discourse, for

example forensic oratory for legal advocates and deliberative oratory for patricians. Such a social and political order meant that charismatic authority first established the mechanisms for legitimacy in speech in the early republic. Beginning with the early Latin manuals, followed by the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and Cicero's early *De inventione*, the place of personae in rhetoric was primarily set by its supposed correspondence with the prediscursive moral character, first of the client and then of the orator speaking on his behalf. In speech, the rhetorical persona was therefore less a question of style (*elocutio*) and delivery (*pronuntiatio*, *actio*) than of establishing the trustworthiness of the persona for the audience in the exordium, establishing the attention (*attentus*), the goodwill (*benivolus*, *benivolentia*), and the receptivity (*docilis*) in the relationship between speaker and audience. The good orator assembles his attributes as a premise in an argument, or as a fixed object in the narration of the speech. In his mature rhetorical writings, however (especially the *De oratore,* the *Brutus*, and the *Orator*), Cicero fully realized the importance of Greek rhetorical theory about character and theorized that an orator can craft his individual identity through a rhetorical persona. In these later works, Cicero does not conceive of the rhetorical persona in terms of correspondence to an orator or client's supposed prediscursive identity but, what is most important, contends that the oratorical persona is fabricated from all parts of the discourse, including inventio, elocutio, and actio or pronuntiatio. It is in discourse itself that the Roman orator fashions a self-image that he projects in public. This is especially felt in the *Orator* where Cicero seems, on the one hand, to replace a single persona with the technical skill to utilize various stylistic personae and, on the other, to argue that one's persona is strictly dependent on decorum (used like the Greek *prepon*); that is, one's style and delivery must suit the situation.[30]

Cicero thus bolstered Latin rhetoric with the discursive persona of Greek rhetorical theory, and while he claims in his letter to Lentulus that he wrote the *De oratore* in the manner of Aristotle (*Aristotelius mos*), some have argued that Cicero is, broadly speaking, following an Isocratean tradition insofar as, unlike Aristotle and others, he never truly divorces the speaker's persona in discourse from the speaker's hypothetical prediscursive natural character.[31] One immediately thinks of the famous passage in the *De officiis* where Cicero grounds the rhetorical persona in philosophy by employing the Stoic Panaetius's fourfold schema of our personae: our common rational nature; what is particular to each individual person's bodies and spirits; what befalls us by chance and circumstance (including social, civic, and familial character traits); and how we define ourselves by choosing to live in certain roles.[32]

Ideally, oratorical delivery serves as a culminating moment for the alignment of these four roles in self-fashioning. Yet in rhetoric the tone of voice may charm, the hand gestures may reassure, the gait may inspire confidence, an exordium may establish the audience's goodwill by recalling a positive ancestry, clothes may suit the decorum of the occasion or imitate the sartorial fashions of the powerful, the right style may seize the crowd's attention, but a dart of the eyes and a furtive glance to a few intimates in the audience may equally reveal different motives, even while the speech aims at being effective and pleasing, persuading and moving the whole crowd. In Cicero's rhetorical writings the theoretical discursive persona agrees exceptionally well with the old Latin auditory etymology for persona, as not only a mask that one puts on public display but also a megaphone, as it were, through which the various stylistic registers and modes of delivery of speech are performed (*per-sonare*).

Traditions examining rhetorical personae are without a doubt of central importance to Italian humanism as a whole. For instance, looking back to the origins of the movement in the mid-fifteenth century, Flavio Biondo (1392–1463) indicated the rediscovery of ancient oratory as a boundary line that marked generational differences in humanism's history: "First of all, Francesco Petrarch, a man of great talent and great industry, began to awaken poetry and eloquence, but in that age in which we blame the dearth and lack of books more than of genius, he did not attain the flower of Ciceronian eloquence that adorns many we see in this century. For he himself, although he boasted of having found the letters of Cicero written to Lentulus at Vercelli, did not know the three books of Cicero's *De oratore* and Quintilian's (c. 35–c. after 96 CE) *Institutiones* except in fragmentary form, and likewise *Orator maior* and *Brutus de oratoribus claris*, books of Cicero, had not come to his knowledge."[33] Although one should not diminish the resonance of Quintilian and other writers of rhetorical theory (and the imitation of good *auctores* in general) in the quattrocento, it is clear that for Biondo—who is probably inspired by Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444) in this regard—Ciceronian oratory holds a preeminent place in the curriculum of the *bonae artes*.

In the generation after Petrarch (1304–74), the letters of the powerful Florentine chancellor Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), who desired (perhaps with some overstatement) to be seen as Petrarch's friend and disciple, found a small but appreciative and impressed audience for their *stilus rhetoricus*. Varying his style according to his audience, Salutati's missives were at times written in a medieval *ars dictaminis*, at times even in the vernacular when his political business required him to write to smaller Italian communes, but at other times in a grand oratorical Latin, drawing on classical literature and history. Legitimized

by his office as chancellor, Salutati's letters, whether sent to allies or foes like the Visconti in Milan, also held a powerful place in the public discourse by expressing the juridical persona of the Florentine republic itself. Leonardo Bruni, his successor as chancellor of Florence, continued on the same path but had a greater command over Cicero's stylistic teachings and found a much larger audience capable of appreciating it. By the end of the quattrocento Ciceronian imitation had become almost a defining initiatory rite for humanists. Most collected and circulated their letters, as Petrarch had done, on the model of Cicero's *Epistulae ad familiares*. The humanists were consumed by attaining new heights in rhetoric and eloquence, and none seemed higher than Cicero.[34] Now the dominant form of the burgeoning *Respublica literaria*, Ciceronianism (as it came to be called) would later become *the* style of public discourse throughout early modern Europe, but at the same time it also lost its appeal for those humanists wishing to test the boundaries of stylistic canons. These later humanists explored a variety of styles to imitate and emulate, including but not limited to models based on the writings of Sallust, Apuleius, Pliny, and the church fathers, or, returning to one of Petrarch's old favorites, Seneca.

Cicero's Persona: Angelo Poliziano and Paolo Cortesi

Nowhere is the criticism of Ciceronianism in the late quattrocento more evidently and more powerfully expressed than in the short-lived exchange of letters between Angelo Poliziano (1454–94) and Paolo Cortesi (1465–1510).[35] Cortesi, a *scriptor* at the Holy See, prompted the debate when he sent his collected letters to the poet and sharpest of Florentine philologists, who subsequently returned them with a brief letter. Having conceded that he did appreciate a few of Cortesi's letters, Poliziano dismissed the rest as a waste of his time, admonishing his junior of nine years: "Still, there is a point regarding style that I disagree with you on. For you generally do not approve of anyone, as I understand it, unless he copies the features of Cicero (*liniamenta Ciceronis*). To me the face of a bull or a lion seems far more honourable than that of an ape, which nonetheless is more like a man than they are. The men who are believed to have held the pinnacle of eloquence are not similar to one another, as Seneca demonstrated. Quintilian laughs at those who considered themselves brothers of Cicero because they closed a period with the phrase, 'it would seem so.'"[36] Poliziano's critique is directed at the fabrication of an imitative Ciceronian persona. The rhetorical mask of Cicero that Cortesi wears publicly, he tells him, resembles more the face

of an ape. "Nothing there is true, nothing solid, nothing effective."[37] Poliziano in turn speaks of himself: "'You do not write like Cicero,' someone says. So what? I am not Cicero. Yet I do express myself, I think."[38] Poliziano's brusque statement implies that for many of his contemporaries Cicero's oratorical persona became confused with the person of the author.

This becomes especially clear when one notices that in this short letter Poliziano twice uses the Ciceronian term liniamentum (used by Cicero for geometric outlines, facial features, and stylistic form) to recall a specific passage from Cicero. In the dialogue *Brutus*, the character Cicero portrays the various traits of Roman orators for two other interlocutors, the work's namesake and Atticus. The latter introduces the topic of rhetoric's ability to mislead and accuses Cicero of irony in comparing the Roman Cato to the Attic Lysias. Cato might have been a great and extraordinary man, Atticus concedes, but not an orator and certainly not of the same caliber as Lysias, "with all his incomparable finish (*pictius*)."[39] Virtue is not the same as eloquence. Atticus is even willing to praise the speeches of the virtuous citizen, senator, and general, but with one fatal qualification, stating that they were good "for their day." Cato does not stand alone in this respect; the *Brutus* produces the examples of Galba, Lepidus, Africanus, Laelius, Carbo, and the Gracchi as ancient orators who should be praised as exemplary men who conducted their lives admirably but whose unpolished speeches lacked eloquence.[40] Surely, Atticus reasons, Cicero does not want to compare these crude *Tusculi* to the Greek masters, nor does he think that Brutus ought to speak in their manner. Cicero responds that Latin models have changed since his youth: "We should have to turn over many books, especially of Cato as well as of others; you would see that his drawing (*liniamentis*) was sharp and that it lacked only some brightness and colours which had not yet been discovered."[41] As in Cicero's example, in Poliziano's day Latin had undergone historical changes, also in part due to the influence of Greek studies. Cicero's point, however, is not that Brutus should imitate the features of one specific group of early orators, let alone one individual among them, but rather that he ought to read many books to learn from different styles. So Poliziano tells Cortesi, "Shift your eyes away from Cicero," as though Cortesi were looking at Cicero as his only mirror to study his own features.[42] In short, Poliziano draws on Cicero to critique a Ciceronian, in effect telling him that he does not understand the relationship between an authorial person and the discursive persona of the rhetorician.

Cortesi, however, is no fool when it comes to Cicero. He immediately picks up on Poliziano's reference and replies with a letter of his own: "You write that

you have understood me to approve of none but those who seem to follow and imitate the features of Cicero (*liniamenta Ciceronis*)."[43] Cortesi denies this. He is not Cicero's ape, he insists, since he believes himself to have a rightful claim to the Roman's inheritance: "The son, however, reproduces appearances, walk, posture, motion, form, voices and finally the shape of his father's body, but still has something of his own in this likeness, something natural, something different. So when compared, they still seem dissimilar from each other."[44] Cortesi seeks a family resemblance to Cicero as a son, not as a brother of Cicero, as Poliziano had also mockingly described Ciceronians. Cortesi understands his rhetorical features (*liniamenta*) not on an equal footing with Cicero's but as though he were a Roman orator displaying his *imagines maiorum* during the performance of his public persona. He calls on the notion of decorum to make his case and to criticize Poliziano's own style—which is often characterized as *docta varietas* or eclectic—claiming that a discourse can only incorporate another's stylistic features when it is suitable to do so. Otherwise, "one makes a sort of monstrosity when the adjacent parts of one's discourse are badly integrated."[45] To Poliziano's forceful "I am not Cicero. Yet I do express myself, I think,"[46] Cortesi retorts: "But when a man wants to look as if he is imitating no one and pursuing praise without similarity to anyone, believe me, he demonstrates no strength or force in his writing, and someone who says that he depends on the support and power of his own talent cannot but pluck sentences from the writings of others and stuff them into his own."[47] Cortesi stands his ground on the claim that imitation cannot be avoided in language and rhetoric, nor can it be avoided in any of the arts, nor even in nature.

Since one cannot flee to a nonimitative or prediscursive authorial person it is best to follow the finest guides. To do otherwise is to imitate not no one but in a sense everyone, taking words, expressions, style, wherever and however without any discriminating taste or *elegantia*; such a method risks breaking decorum and resulting in poor oratory. It is thus Poliziano, Cortesi argues, who does not understand the relationship between the authorial person and the oratorical persona. If Poliziano claims only to express himself and not to imitate anyone in particular, according to Cortesi's logic, he denies the imitative nature of the rhetorical personae that he adopts. In effect Cortesi concludes that Poliziano's position if he were to understand its implications would equate artifice with nature and create a world of masks in which there would be no chance at delineating a prediscursive persona. Poliziano's brilliantly varied self-expression would be simply another act.

To be sure, if one spends time reading Poliziano one finds that there is no one quite like him, yet there is nothing stable about him either. Instead, one finds him in constant flux, varying his style, stringing together the most erudite philological or carefully selected Apuleian references into an elegant and sometimes seemingly casual letter to a friend or cultural competitor. Poliziano's prefatory letter to Piero de' Medici (1471–1503) for his collected epistles is also telling in this regard. Responding proleptically against potential critics who might reproach his miscellaneous style for breaking all conventions and rules of decorum (and he goes through a litany of them), Poliziano ends his preface, one imagines with a clever smile, by discharging one of Cicero's preferred terms as a projectile aimed at future critics: "In such a manner I hope to be able to wriggle my way out (*tergiversari*) of whatever comes my way."[48] At least, Cortesi reasons, his own style has a clear and noble lineage that expresses itself in a fitting manner at appropriate times. One wonders if Cortesi's insistence on the filial genealogy of his rhetorical persona and on the orphaned nature of Poliziano's style struck Poliziano on a personal note, for Poliziano himself was orphaned as a child when his father was murdered for supporting the Medici. Perhaps not. In any case, Poliziano, who found a home in the Medici's extended *familia*, never responded to Cortesi's reply.

The Philosopher's Decorum: Giovanni Pico and Barbaro

The arguments Cortesi makes in his correspondence with Poliziano agree with his preface to his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, where he contends that even in the case of philosophy one cannot do without guidelines for rhetorical style. Contrary to those who see rhetoric and philosophy as incompatible, comparing the application of eloquence to philosophy as hiding a beautiful face behind cosmetics, Cortesi argues that philosophy should at least not be obscure.[49] The question of the stylistic decorum of philosophy evokes a second important epistolary exchange from 1485 between the Venetian humanist Ermolao Barbaro and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) on the topic of the correct Latin style for philosophy, otherwise known as the question *de genera dicendi philosophorum*.[50] These two friends of Poliziano and Ficino took up the question after Barbaro wrote to Pico on 5 April 1485 criticizing the uneducated and barbaric writings of scholastic philosophers. Barbaro was thus following the solidly humanist occupation, dating back to Petrarch, of critiquing medieval doctors for

their lack of eloquence, learning, methods, and goals. Petrarch and Barbaro were good candidates for the task, but Pico was one of the prodigious humanists (Ficino is another) who was educated not only in the *studia humanitatis* but also in scholastic philosophy. Pico's scholastic education brought him to the University of Bologna to study canon law at the age of fourteen, and a few years later to the Universities of Ferrara and Padua, where he studied philosophy until 1482—it is during a brief trip to Florence at this time that he seems to have first met Poliziano and Girolamo Benivieni (1453–1542). In 1484 he found himself residing in Florence, to which in later years he would often return to converse with Lorenzo, Poliziano, and Ficino. In 1485 the twenty-two-year-old count traveled to the University of Paris to immerse himself further in scholastic philosophy. Barbaro's letter was therefore undoubtedly spurred by Pico's scholastic education and perhaps even by his latest desire to study with the Parisian doctors.

Pico's response abounds in eloquent and erudite wit, and sets the tone for the debate. Coming to the aid of scholastic philosophers, Pico writes a prosopopoeic defense expressed *ex persona barbari*. With a clear play on Barbaro's name—in the Venetian's own words "*barbaros contra Barbarum defendis*"—Pico writes in the persona of a barbarian philosopher defending scholasticism through an eloquent rhetorical speech.[51] Pico, who admits his desire to imitate Barbaro's own rhetorical voice, in effect doubles the personification of his letter, writing in a style that approaches Barbaro's actual stylistic inclinations.[52] In effect, Pico is personifying Barbaro, who is cast in the role of a barbarian philosopher eloquently defending the scholastics' lack of eloquence. For his part, Barbaro responds in the persona of a certain ape from the University of Padua, where Pico had studied. Portraying Pico not as a learned philologist (*grammaticus*) but as a lowly schoolteacher (*grammatista*), the Paduan philosopher (Barbaro's fabricated character) declaims that the scholastic method does not need the help of rhetoric.[53] Barbaro's ape bumbles his way through Cicero's distinctions between the personae of the client, the patron, and the advocate, as well as the distinctions in registers of Attic, Asiatic, Germanic, and even Persian styles, concluding that none of them is necessary. In the end, he produces clumsy syllogisms to argue his case.

One should not dismiss the two letters, written in the genre of a paradoxical encomium, as a fictitious debate produced for the private amusement of two humanists essentially sharing the same opinion on the question. Indeed, I would stress two points: first, that since Pico was trained in both camps his exchange with Barbaro was not a simple literary game within the closed circle of humanism and, second, that the tone of the disputation is that of *serioludere*, or play-

fully communicating serious matters, often associated with Socrates' manner of talking. Pico's own appeal to Glaucon from the *Republic* underscores the Platonic nature of their exchange. Like Socrates who disavows opinions he has just expressed—one thinks, for example, of Socrates' personification of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* (164e–168c)—Pico declares after his barbarian philosopher has just finished his speech: "But I exercised myself with pleasure in this infamous matter, so to speak, like those who praise the quartan fever, not only to prove my *ingenium*, but also with this intention: that, just as Plato's Glaucon praises injustice not according to his own judgment but so that he might spur Socrates to praise justice, so I, in order to hear you defend eloquence passionately, turned on it without restraint—even though my own nature and disposition briefly fought back."[54] Barbaro's initial accusation forces Pico's philosopher to give a public defense for his office on his own terms without an advocate, which is exactly what Socrates repeatedly claimed the philosopher would never be able to do, stressing the uselessness of philosophy for the public life.[55] Through these layers and inversions of personifications Pico and Barbaro debate central questions regarding philosophical writing, asking in what style philosophy should be written, does philosophy's formalized, even artificial language clarify or obscure its content, and, simply, what counts as philosophical language?

Pico's philosopher defines these questions by contrasting philosophical and rhetorical language. What is a rhetorician's duty, he asks, if not to lie, deceive, trick, turn things upside down? The orator changes white into black, black into white, and magically changes his face and appearance. "Does he not mislead just as *larvae* and *simulacra* projected onto the mind of the audience to mislead them? Will this person have something in common with the philosopher, whose zeal is completely turned towards the knowledge and demonstration of truth to others?"[56] The rhetorician's art is better suited to forensic questions than to the Academy. Pico's barbarian continues, "Do you not know that not all things made in the same fabric are appropriate to all? I'll admit that eloquence is filled with lures and delight is indeed elegant, but it is neither acceptable nor fit for the decorum of a philosopher. Who does not esteem a soft step, graceful hands, and playful eyes in an actor or a dancer? But in a citizen, a philosopher, who does not disapprove, complain, and loathe the same features?"[57] What one says and how one says it must suit the situation, time, place, and audience. If the rhetorician is to retain and present a prediscursive persona in his speech (instead of being nothing but a deceitful magician), his discourse must conform to his natural character. Playing with the imagery of fabric as the *textus* of speech, Pico's letter conveys the idea that one's style of speech must suit one's style of life, just as one

ought to wear clothes appropriate to the occasion. In this case, it is a philosopher's style of life that is at stake. In the end, Pico's performance as a scholastic philosopher orating in beautiful Latin to make his case destabilizes any fully defined notion of decorum.

Glossaries of the Dead: Gianfrancesco Pico and Bembo

Before turning to Ficino's own epistolography I think it important to examine a final exchange of letters, dated 1512–13—one of the most famous exhanges on the issue of Ciceronianism—between Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1470–1533), the nephew of Giovanni Pico, and Pietro Bembo (1470–1547) on the question of imitation.[58] Their correspondence serves as a capstone to the previous debates, not so much because they have the final say on the question of Ciceronianism—in fact Erasmus reignited the question among a wider European audience—but because they recapitulate Poliziano's and Cortesi's as well as Giovanni Pico's and Barbaro's epistles while adding their own arguments. Most important, they bring some of the Platonic preoccupations latent in the two previous exchanges to light.

On the surface Bembo suggests that he is generally in agreement with Cortesi for arguing that one ought to imitate Cicero in prose (as well as Virgil in poetry) and claims that Gianfrancesco Pico is in Poliziano's camp for defending eclecticism. Despite protesting that their disagreement is different from Poliziano and Cortesi's, Gianfrancesco Pico picks up where Poliziano left off by discussing Ciceronian liniamenta. The fact that he employs the term *liniamenta* on seven occasions further underscores that their debate is also centred on the notion of the rhetorical persona. Gianfrancesco Pico, moreover, argues in more explicit terms than the two previous groups of letters for the existence of a prediscursive persona. Given that he was one of the first close readers of Sextus Empiricus, Giovanni Pico is usually described as a skeptic or fideist dogmatist rather than a Platonist. Nevertheless, he articulates at the outset of the controversy's first letter the importance of Plato (whose position he compares broadly to that of Cicero and Horace) for their debate.

One finds out from Gianfrancesco Pico's letters that a Platonic approach to rhetoric entails two related positions: an epistemological theory of innatism, according to which one naturally possesses inborn reasons or forms of ideas in one's ingenium, and a metaphysical theory that persons have interior souls and minds. The younger Pico says, "Perhaps some will say that we should concen-

trate on imitating those who please us the most. I would not disagree with this advice. Plato may please you more than others; so may Cicero who is Platonic not only in his views but also in style. We should follow them. For although the features (face; *facies animi*) of each person's soul, like those of his body, are so proper to him that it is difficult to find two that are completely alike, our souls are still less dissimilar to some than to others, and it will therefore be easier for us to become like them."[59] In his first letter, arguing that one ought to emulate all good writers, the younger Pico also stresses the reliance on one's singular innate conception of beauty and eloquence over multiple models. With this in mind he values the free discovery of ingenium in rhetoric, and accordingly prioritizes inventio over dispositio, elocutio, memoria, or pronuntiatio in the stages of rhetorical composition: "I don't think there is any need to talk about memory or pronunciation, since neither of these is set down on paper."[60]

Both authors seek to delineate the method of rhetorical composition (*scribendi ratio*, to use Bembo's terminology), but contrary to Gianfrancesco Pico's Platonic appeal to one's natural ingenium, Bembo puts forward the case that to become eloquent one needs *ars* and imitative exercises:

> But it's your business if you see in your soul an idea and form of writing planted there and handed down by nature. I can speak to you only of my soul. I saw no form of style in it, no pattern of discourse before I developed myself in mind and thought by reading the books of the ancients over the course of many years, by long labor, practice and exercise. Since something should be said about this, I now turn to that topic. I see by thought, as though with my eyes, from what source to take the highest example which I need to compose some piece of writing. Yet, before I engaged in the thoughts I mention, I too used to look no less into my soul and to seek, as in a mirror, some likeness I might use to compose what I wanted. But there was no likeness in my soul, nothing presented itself to me; I saw nothing.[61]

Instead of looking into the interior mirror of his soul, Bembo self-fashions his rhetorical persona on Cicero's likeness, which he sees externally before his eyes (*ante oculos*).[62] To put it succinctly, for Bembo there seems to be no prediscursive persona.

These epistolary exchanges illustrate how much humanist Latin imitative practices are also dominated by prosopopoeia. The debates over Ciceronianism and the question *de genere dicendi philosophorum* investigate what it means to

fabricate one's own persona. Continuing Poliziano's discussion of Cicero's liniamenta, and Giovanni Pico and Barbaro's examination of decorum, Gianfrancesco Pico and Bembo consciously draw on the correspondence between text, clothes, and body, but more importantly on the correspondence between a rhetorical persona and a human face, to make their case. For instance, Gianfrancesco Pico describes Ciceronians who base their style on one sole model as wishing to copy all aspects of a human face, including scars, warts, and the like.[63] With such a method, he reasons, they attempt to raise Cicero from the dead and give his texts a voice. Yet Gianfrancesco Pico's philological sensitivity also leads him to believe that some of Cicero's texts, like decaying corpses, may have been corrupted in the great span of time that separates him from Cicero's age. "If Cicero were revived from the dead, he would deny that they had taken these words from him. Or they pay careful regard even to what booksellers have published, who corrupt the integrity of the text throughout in the process."[64]

Bembo's reply to Gianfrancesco Pico's criticism instead argues that Pico's eclecticism corrupts Cicero's body. It takes some of his facial features and some from others, and grafts together their skin, bones, eyes, mouth into a grisly human mask-something like Victor Frankenstein's creation, which is certainly far from elegant. For Bembo, each part ought to fit into a harmonious whole: "What is good and excellent in any writer flows together and coalesces from all the parts of his work. All his virtues, but also his faults (if he has any) go together to make up his style. If we consider the faces of men, one reflects a kind of character; another, a lively nature; another, courage; another, a fertile intelligence; another, grandeur; another, charm. Yet individual characteristics come not only from the shape of one's eyes, eyebrows, mouth, cheeks or the quality of any other part, but each is constituted of all the parts and members of its own face."[65] To do otherwise would create a polycephalic monster, like Homer's deceitful Proteus.[66]

In his second letter to Bembo, Gianfrancesco Pico cedes him neither the point nor even the imagery. Once more he compares strict Ciceronian imitators to false necromancers who try to resurrect Cicero:

> But go on and imagine that you are Apelles or have raised Zeuxis, Phidias, Praxiteles, Lysippus and Pyrgoteles from the underworld to reproduce for you not the garments but the body of Cicero. For when these great artists have used brush, chisel or the art of metal-casting and have set the image of Cicero himself before your eyes (*sub oculos*), they will have performed their duty. Yet this Cicero will be painted or

> marble or bronze, not flesh. I'll even grant something more: that they equal Cicero's flesh through imitation. But shouldn't we think that the only true Cicero was his soul and spirit which informed his flesh—the Cicero who envisioned the form of oratory in his soul, added living strength and grace to it and then expressed all these spiritual motions through the medium of his tongue? So whoever supposes that they have acquired the living tongue of Cicero should bear in their mind Cicero's conceptions; they should have experience and knowledge, moreover, of a great many important affairs. Otherwise, if they lack the Tullian spirit, Cato may call them "Glossaries of the Dead" (*mortuaria glossaria*).[67]

Cicero is dead, his soul is extinguished, and his voice silenced. Ciceronians who wish to resuscitate him, employing rhetorical enargeia by placing his persona before our eyes (*sub oculos*), or who wish to give him his voice again, trying to revive a lost orality from his surviving writings, do nothing more than become *mortuaria glossaria*.[68] The death masks of Cicero that they fabricate with texts are really "*larvae*, phantoms or vanishing shades, rather than men, for they lack the strength and spirit of living beings."[69] Like Socrates wishing to dispel the fear of the mormolukeion by turning the mask upside down to show that there is nothing on its reverse, so Gianfrancesco Pico wishes to do the same by flipping the Ciceronian mask to reveal that it is in fact a larva, an empty horror mask. Yet, one should remember that this is also Bembo's point: when he looks inside himself for a prediscursive persona he claims to find none. Much of their debate hinges on a specific passage from Cicero's *Orator*: "In fashioning the best orator I shall construct such a one as perhaps has never existed."[70] Gianfrancesco Pico interprets this passage to mean that Cicero denies that the best orator ever existed in history; he therefore points to an interior Platonic ideal. Bembo understands this passage to say that no such ideal orator ever existed or ever will exist (in history or in the mind), and so one can only look outside oneself for imitative models.

For Bembo, the adoption of a rhetorical persona is not simply a question of donning a ready-made mask, one first needs to fabricate it by imitation. Before placing something over one's face, one needs to set texts before one's eyes (*ante oculos*) as though entering into a dialogue with an author. Therefore, even Bembo's critique of Gianfrancesco Pico's Platonic theory of style retains an element of Platonism. When Bembo turns inward to his soul to see his own rhetorical persona, as Gianfrancesco Pico prescribes, he admits that he finds

nothing. Instead he needs to participate in a discursive process of dialogue and imitation in order to know himself.

There is therefore, I believe, a close correspondence for these humanists between the dialogue and the epistolary form. Christopher Celenza has singled out the term *disputatio* from Cortesi's description of his correspondence with Poliziano, explaining how rules of public epistles would allow for disagreement on good terms.[71] Given Poliziano's variegated style, responding to his call for debate would have been a particularly difficult task, especially since the short length of his letter reveals one of his strongest arguments: that he has little time for rehearsing Ciceronian routines.[72] Giovanni Pico and Barbaro stage their letters as two courtroom orators, Pico's eloquent barbarian philosopher and Barbaro's Paduan ape, argue similarly over the defense of scholastic argumentation, almost self-consciously testing the limits of compatibility between humanist and scholastic disputatio. One can also easily imagine how the letters between Poliziano and Cortesi, and even Pico and Barbaro, could resemble oral conversations that might have occurred in person. Their letters could in fact include reworked versions of oral arguments that they transcribed onto paper for a larger public. Indeed, the letters between Gianfrancesco Pico and Bembo make it explicitly clear that they were restaging in writing what originally took place face to face. There certainly are, as Bembo remarks in his letter, differences between their oral conversations and their letters. Nevertheless, their epistles mark an attempt at transferring this oral debate into writing. They describe their own exchange as a *disputatio* and a *controversia* (a term they also apply to Poliziano and Cortesi's letters), but also importantly as *sermones, colloquia*, and *orationes*.[73] The language introducing Bembo's response places it firmly within the field of rhetoric, and the humanists in whose circle it circulated would immediately have recognized it as such. It reveals the performative nature of their epistles and sets the stage for the written debate. Bembo carefully documents the resemblances as well as the differences, even noting improvements, carried over from their previous oral conversations and speeches into letters. Despite the effects of time and memory on writing, in Bembo's opinion, the previously spoken words are not completely separated from their transposition into a literary form. These humanist epistolary forms are thus fabrications of discursive rhetorical personae that anchor themselves more firmly into the memory of their readers. In short, whether it is through Ciceronians reanimating only the single corpse of Cicero or eclectic imitators stitching together various body parts to form a creature of their own design, examinations of past languages are akin to necromantic desires to raise dead voices by evoking frag-

mentary bursts from various otherwise silent prosopa. Prosopopoeia and enargeia are thus key ways in which Renaissance humanists investigated and related to the past.

Ficino's Persona: A Platonic Republic of Letters

Ficino is absent from these famous epistolary conversations of friends and at times amicable competitors. He is also almost completely absent in scholarly studies on Ciceronianism, rhetoric, and Renaissance dialogue.[74] Nevertheless, Ficino's epistolography is directly relevant to these topics. The eldest of the aforementioned humanists by at least twenty-one years, Ficino corresponded with many of them, often expressing a common bond of friendship. Cortesi and Bembo are two exceptions, but Bembo's father, the Venetian ambassador Bernardo Bembo (1433–1519), was one of Ficino's favorite correspondents. When surveying these controversies a generation later in his *Ciceronianus* (1528), Erasmus claimed that only Pietro Bembo could be considered Ciceronian, explaining that Barbaro's style is overworked like that of Quintilian and Pliny, the styles of Giovanni and Gianfrancesco Pico are harmed by their zeal for philosophy and theology, and Poliziano's great talent for all kinds of writings does not compare to Cicero. He groups Ficino in their company, but the philosopher fares only slightly better than Cortesi, whom Erasmus ignores altogether, since Erasmus simply says that he would not dare to speak about Ficino's style.[75] Why would Erasmus hesitatingly write of Ficino's style as being on the periphery of Ciceronian debates?

Like his contemporaries, and like the generation of humanists before him, Ficino continued the Petrarchan project of collecting his epistles for publication. Like other humanists of his day, Ficino sent his letters to individual addressees, had scribes prepare second versions of some meant for transmission to other recipients in his network, and circulated collections in manuscript copies dedicated to important patrons. He was, however, also one the first humanists, and certainly one the first philosophers, to make use of the printing press to publish his collected letters, bringing out twelve volumes of his epistolography in Venice in 1495. In writing these epistles Ficino does not immediately follow the two traditional models for philosophical letters, Seneca and Cicero, yet philosophical style was nonetheless important to him.[76] If Ficino did not participate in the above-mentioned epistolary controversies and disputations on Ciceronianism, his writings neglect neither to address the question of rhetorical

personae nor to develop a particular philosophical style. As I pointed out in the Introduction to this book, Ficino employs a trope inspired by Plato's *Phaedrus* in the preface to the 1495 printing of his letters, addressing the prefatory letter to his letters themselves, which he personifies as his children. On the first page of the volume, therefore, Ficino signals to his readers that his letters will be written in a Platonic style.

The fact that the Platonic philosopher and excellent Hellenist also received an education both in scholastic philosophy and in the Latin curriculum of the liberal arts in humanist schools in Florence should not be neglected in the present discussion.[77] These latter two facets of his education are evident throughout his life. First, concerning his scholasticism, Ficino cites numerous scholastic authorities, and with the exception of so-called Averroists and Alexandrians, he usually does so positively. He regularly adopts scholastic terminology in his Latin prose, which demonstrates that he did not fear employing Latin as a *lingua artificialis*, but he also constantly returns to the Greek sources and demonstrates a certain willingness to critique scholastic neologisms and rethink their Latin prose in Platonic terms.[78] For instance, in his *epitome* to the *Euthydemus*, Ficino critiques the terminological confusion of logic and dialectic present throughout the Middle Ages.[79] More than just orthographic and terminological preferences lie behind Ficino's critique of *dialecticen*, *dialectica*, and *logica*. In fact, there is a Platonic critique of syllogistic methods. Plotinus and later Neoplatonists argued that dialectic is the highest part of philosophy and not merely an external instrument to clarify its subject matter and formulate arguments, and in doing so differentiated themselves from most Stoics and Peripatetics.[80] Ficino pairs dialectic with rhetoric and also distinguishes rhetoric from pure sophistry, which he often characterizes as magically enchanting or bewitching (*fascinationis maleficae speciem*) its audience's mind by manipulating appearances instead of speaking truth. Ficino, however, stakes his claim on Platonic grounds. Dialecticen (the medieval arts of logic and syllogistics) concerns itself with terms, predicates, and propositions, and if not correctly used is also capable of approaching sophistry when it employs enthymeme. Dialectica or Platonic dialectic, conversely, concerns itself not with terms, predicates, and propositions as such but rather with the movement of the mind itself in analysis and synthesis, that is, the division and weaving together of the presence of intelligibles as logoi in the mind. Ficino's argument closely resembles Plotinus's in *Enneads* 1.3.4, where Plotinus explains that the discursive process of dialectic comes to rest in the quiet tranquility (ἡσυχία) of Plato's noetic "Plain of truth" (*Phaedrus* 248b6), and leaves logic behind to busy itself by meddling in the affairs of

propositions and syllogisms (πολυπραγμονοῦσα).[81] Thus Ficino thought of dialectic as the philosophical or even metaphysical-theological capstone to the demonstrative and mathematical sciences.

Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Parmenides* once more places Latin neologisms under the light of Platonic metaphysics.[82] When some Platonists speak about the triad of divine attributes being-life-intellect, Ficino explains, they not only demarcate concrete designations (being or *ens*, for example) from abstract ones (*essentia*), they also differentiate a third class, abstractions of abstractions (*essentialitas*), which push Latin as a lingua artificialis to its limits. There, Ficino notes, language seems out of place and even ludicrous.[83] His point, however, is not to dismiss abstract neologisms altogether, nor to dismiss the triad of being-life-intellect. Quite the contrary: he frequently employs neologisms and the triad. To be more precise, in his commentary Ficino is observing Proclus's remarks regarding the arguments of certain Platonists who claim that, since the first principle of all things—the One—is above the triad of being-life-intellect, which for the Neoplatonists was situated at the second hypostasis of Intellect, "it possesses within itself in some way the causes of all these things unutterably and unimaginably and in the most unified way, and in a way unknowable to us but knowable to itself."[84] These higher abstract neologisms demonstrate an attempt to designate what cannot be designated since they would speak from the perspective of the One. Ficino's Latin neologisms speak more to language's failure to assert and to its capabilities to negate. In short, the philosophical brevity of Neoplatonic dialectic begins to turn toward apophatic philosophy.

Turning to the second facet of his education and his relationship to humanistic rhetoric, Ficino employs his rhetorical training in various forms. For example, in addition to his philosophical occupations he taught the liberal arts, including oratorical composition and progymnasmata exercises, to some of the noble youth of Florence.[85] It has been noted by past scholars that although his prose is polished, clear, and precise, Ficino does not often bother with the same kinds of ornate figures of speech as those used by his often more Ciceronian humanist contemporaries.[86] Gianfrancesco Pico and Bembo noted that however much humanists tried to revive Cicero's eloquence they would never hear him speak or see his features in person. They were acutely aware that although many wished to fashion Ciceronian personae, they could never fully achieve their aims, since an oratorical persona, as Cicero and other ancient rhetoricians explained, is not only formed by the style (*elocutio*) and narrative content (*inventio* and *dispositio*) of recorded speech but is made of the actual oratorical delivery. The absence of the persona of pronuntiatio and actio, that is, of the

orator's own voice and performance, thus led to important debates among humanists regarding their relationship to the past and concerning the fabrication of rhetorical personae.

Ficino's approach to the recovery of Plato's voice reveals similar preoccupations. Giovanni Corsi's biography of Ficino exactly expresses this when Corsi explains that under Cicero's influence Ficino desired to be able to speak to Plato and the Platonists face to face. It is of course a humanist commonplace to wish to speak with the ancients. To cite two famous examples, Petrarch was in the habit of writing that he would speak with Cicero and longed to converse with Homer and Plato, and Machiavelli described how at the end of the day he would dress in his best clothes to enter into conversation with the ancients.[87] It is equally apparent, however, that Corsi is not simply drawing on current intellectual fashions but working explicitly with Ficino's own writings to describe Ficino's conversations and communions with Plato and the Platonists. Already in 1464, in the preface to his first Latin translation of ten of Plato's dialogues, Ficino wrote to Cosimo de' Medici: "As you saw already some time ago Plato's spirit echoing with a living Attic voice in the text itself flew from Byzantium to Florence to Cosimo de' Medici. So that he may discuss with him not only in Greek but also in Latin, it seemed to me worthwhile to translate some of the many things he says in Greek into Latin."[88] What at first sight comes across as a somewhat superficial humanist commonplace turns out in Ficino's hands to be part of a sophisticated approach toward Plato's texts.

In a passage from the preface to his commentaries on Plato's dialogues, addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici, Ficino draws on the trope of Socratic serioludere to interpret Plato's style of writing:

> Meanwhile, while our Plato discusses often in a hidden manner the duty belonging to mankind it sometimes seems as though he is joking and playing. But Platonic games and jokes are much more serious than the serious things of the Stoics. For he does not disdain to wander occasionally through certain humble matters, if only gradually to guide his listeners, who grasp humble things more easily, to more elevated matters. With the most serious purpose he often mixes the useful with the sweet, by which with the modest grace of charming speech he may lure minds that are naturally prone to pleasure to sustenance with the bait of pleasure itself. And he often composes fables in a poetic manner, for in fact the style itself of Plato seems not so much philosophical as poetic. For he sometimes raves and wanders,

> as a *vates*, all the while paying no attention to a human order but to one prophetic and divine. And he acts not so much in the *persona* of a teacher as in the *persona* of a certain priest or *vates*, at times in furor but sometimes purifying others and seizing them similarly in divine fury. . . . However, Plato delivers everything in the dialogues so that he may place living speeches, as speaking *personae* before our eyes, as well as persuade effectively and move vehemently.[89]

I want to emphasize that in this passage Ficino is calling upon the rhetorical concept of persona in two separate ways, which one can compare to the distinction made in Cicero's *De Oratore* between the *actoris persona*, the mask of the actor, and the *auctoris persona*, the mask of the author.[90] First, Ficino is approaching Cicero's explanation of the rhetorical persona in the *De Oratore* insofar as personae are understood as how one presents oneself distinctly through discursive techniques that in effect become the textual masks of the author. The *persona Platonis*, Ficino tells us, is less a *docentis persona* than a *sacerdotis atque vatis persona*.[91] In other words, following Cicero's three levels of style, the high, middle, and low, Ficino is drawing attention to the fact that Plato's prose is only expressed in the low or humble style, the *sermo humilis* or the *stylus sobrius*, when it aims at elevating the reader's thoughts. The prose's lighthearted treatment of grave matters, Plato's serioludere, hovers around the middle style, which aims to teach serious topics in a pleasing manner, before it reaches toward the sublime heights of the persona of the priest or prophet (*sacerdotis atque vatis persona*).

Second, and most important, by saying that Plato is writing living speeches that bring speaking personae before our eyes, Ficino offers an insightful etymological explanation of the dialogic role of the actoris persona, insofar as he is *not* invoking the Latin auditory etymology of persona but rather the Greek visual etymology of prosopon. As the prefix *pros* indicates, for the Greeks the prosopon, the mask and the face, is literally that which is seen in front of or facing something. Ficino here offers a corrective to Boethius's erroneous etymology by telling his readers that Plato's prosopa are masks placed not on top of our eyes (*ante oculos obtegant*, as Boethius has it) but in front of our eyes, speaking before us (*personas loquentes ante oculos ponat*, as Ficino expresses the etymology).[92] To quote from Ficino again, the use of dialogic personae allows Plato to present various levels of style and different opinions within one text by offering various *actorum personae*. His dialogic personae serve as the reader's interlocutors and invoke Plato's argument expressed in the *Republic* that the prosopon is intimately related to the Greek prosrhesis, or man's ability to address someone in

speech and name things. That is, in order to begin to do philosophy one first needs to turn one's head and begin a face-to-face dialogue with another interlocutor, which Plato's allegorical prisoners were unable to do.

Ficino's letters often exhibit similar Platonic dialogic qualities. For example, in a series of letters written in 1468 to his dear friend Giovanni Cavalcanti (1444–1509), of the same patrician family as the poet Guido Cavalcanti, Ficino, who was thirty-five years old then, plays the part of the Socratic lover and casts the younger twenty-four-year-old Cavalcanti in the role of his beloved, his Hellen, his Achates, or his Eros.[93] The letters are the first of many that reperform the *Phaedrus*'s dialogic structure. As a group they offer an example of a constant in Ficino's work: the investigation and imitation of Socratic/Platonic serioludere. In the second letter of the series, written to Cavalcanti not too long after the first, Ficino renews the game:

> I have often searched for myself, Giovanni, first laying my hands on my chest, then I would often see this face in a mirror, but I can claim that on the one hand I could never really touch myself, nor on the other ever see myself. For when I seek myself I in fact seek none other than the one who is searching, whereby it is altogether the same Marsilio who is searching and who is sought. Who therefore is seeking? Only the rational soul can decide. Therefore, I seek only the rational soul when I search for myself, inasmuch as I am only the rational soul itself. . . . Clearly, in this interior gaze of mine I am neither pleased enough nor at rest. However, he who tracks down what is sought, immediately rejoices and is at peace, therefore I do not discover myself in me. But if I seek myself in another, how will I apprehend myself? If I do not have myself through which alone I am able to grasp whatever I am able to grasp. Therefore return and give yourself, or rather myself, back to me.[94]

Ficino's love letters to Cavalcanti are occasions, as letters often are, to reflect on the distance between sender and recipient. In this case, Ficino plays with the distance of longing as a demonstration of the *Meno*'s paradox (80d–e) that one cannot search for what one already has, but that one will also not know what to search for if one does not already have it. Yet Ficino's letters also evoke the proximity of the closest intimacy. In his letters, Ficino engages in a discursive process of self-knowledge whereby before one turns inward toward one's own spirit or inner self, one seeks oneself in another person, just as though one were to look at

one's face in the mirror; that is, he enacts Socrates' claim in the *Phaedrus* (255d) that the lover sees himself in his beloved. Ficino's letter to Cavalcanti evokes similar aesthetics to later Renaissance depictions of Socratic philosophy in the visual arts. Ficino's description of Cavalcanti holding his letter as though it were a mirror reflecting Ficino and Cavalcanti's countenance uniting two persons in a single gaze is analogous to the later canvas by Jusepe de Ribera (1591–1652) of a philosopher seeing his Socratic reflection in a mirror (Figure 8). In turn, like Socrates and Theaetetus studying each other's faces, Ficino's letters reveal Cavalcanti's own countenance to himself and are meant to serve as mirrors for Cavalcanti's own interiorization of discursive self-knowledge. Ficino proclaims to his friend: "The same, or at least the most similar, spirit (*genius*) directs both of us."[95] In asking Cavalcanti to return himself, Ficino playfully requests a reply to his letter.

The theme of friendship is also central to the Petrarchan revival of the Ciceronian form of letters to friends. Thus, on the one hand, in his letters to Cavalcanti Ficino rehearses what was becoming a standard mode of humanistic expression. Yet, on the other, Ficino demarcates himself from his company by framing the letters to friends in the *mos Platonicus* of Socratic love. In the same group of letters Ficino reveals some of the mechanisms of his artifice to Cavalcanti: "I wrote a few letters to you, my greatest friend, in which I tried my hand in a certain way at the style of lovers, which indeed seems to be appropriate to our intimacy, and is not far from that honest free speech of Socrates and Plato. However, in the manner of the Platonists, now after the lovers' game (for this is the Platonic manner of introduction) we come to serious matters. Now hear what was said with Bernardo Giugni and Bartolomeo Fortini, excellent citizens in justice, when we discussed the intellect."[96] The *ludus* now over (at least temporarily), what follows in this other letter is Ficino's serious and quite sober transcription of questions concerning the mind and soul, which he claims to have discussed with two learned Florentine statesmen. In this second exposition of questions concerning the mind and soul Ficino considers it important to argue against the so-called Averroist opinion on the unity of the intellect, that is, that all men share a single intellect. This is all the more significant for Ficino because in writing to Cavalcanti that the real self is an interior person, he wishes to maintain its individuality while also explaining how it unites with others. Ficino is therefore carefully avoiding the risk of being interpreted as advocating the so-called Averroist position on the unity of the intellect.

In response to an inquiry by the humanist Bartolomeo della Fonte (1445–1513) about his own style of prose, Ficino took the opportunity to explain how the best writers—Plato chief of all—mixed poetry into prose: "You recognize

FIGURE 8. *Philosopher with Mirror*, copy after Jusepe de Ribera.
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

that Plato's style surges high above pedestrian style and prose, as Quintilian says, so much that our Plato seems not to have a human ingenium, but is instead inspired by a certain Delphic oracle. In fact, Plato's mixing and combination of poetry and prose pleased Cicero to such an extent that he claimed that if Jupiter wished to speak with a human tongue he would use no other tongue than the one with which Plato speaks."[97] Plato's style takes on universal proportions for Ficino. He compares what he takes to be similar infusions of poetic rhythms into prose in the Old Testament, in the Egyptian works of Hermes (that is, the *Corpus Hermeticum*), among eloquent Greeks (Gorgias, Isocrates, Herodotus, Aristides), among Latin authors of the golden age (Livy and Cicero), and later (Apuleius, Jerome, and Boethius). Following further reflection on the nature of prose, poetry, and music, Ficino returns to his own imitative style to drive his point home.[98] He is not claiming that all of the authors cited are Platonic. Rather, he is marshaling a series of ancient authorities who either praised Plato's style or mixed poetic rhythm into prose, as a way of building a consensus to defend Plato's style, and in turn his own. More specifically, he addresses the very question of the appropriate stylistic decorum for writing philosophy. In his case, he shapes his rhetorical style to correspond to Platonic philosophy. In his mind, it is only appropriate that he imitate a Platonic stylistic form to suit his Platonic content.

The union with Cavalcanti also characterizes Ficino's bonds with other intimates. Playing on the physical distance between himself and his letters' recipients, Ficino often conveys the message that the material letter serves the role of one's body or face, bridging the distance with mixed results, as, for instance, when he writes to Carlo Marsuppini on 1 March 1473: "Marsuppini, I saw a more beautiful Marsilio in the pupil of your eye than the present Marsilio. But let us go on. Indeed, your letter is so persuasive that it compels me to respond with my feet instead of my hands, and with my voice instead of my letters."[99] Ficino is once more playing an epistolary game. The "beautiful Marsilio in the pupil of your eye" to which he refers in the letter is none other than Marsuppini's previous letter.[100] Similarly, to Giuliano de' Medici, younger than Ficino by twenty-one years, he writes: "'But why did you not send for me,' you say, 'when you were able to?' Even if I were to think that you are absent there, I would not have sent for you, lest I would become a greater nuisance to you. In fact, for some time now my great love for you has impressed your figure into my mind (*figuram tuam animo impressit meo*), and in the same way that I see myself in the mirror (*speculo*) sometimes, I see (*speculor*) you most often in me in my heart. Moreover, your brother Lorenzo, your other self, your other nature, and your other will, was also present then; and thus, when I saw clearly (*perspicerem*;

perspicue) my Giuliano equally within me and outside me, I was not able to think that he was absent from me."[101] The letters—filled with self-reflective puns—convey the persistent philosophical trope that the presence of Ficino's companions, whether in person or in text, are means for self-knowledge and communion of souls. Ficino's letter defines Lorenzo as his brother Giuliano's "alter ego," just as Ficino at times characterized some of his correspondents, and just as some of Ficino's contemporaries portrayed him as "alter Plato."

Therefore, more than joining together merely two individuals, Ficino's Platonic love letters aim at uniting communities. In a response to Cavalcanti's complaint that Ficino is sacrilegiously breaking their sacred friendship by not writing to him while he worked on his *Platonic Theology* in his country residence, Ficino first personifies Plato to reproach himself for not writing and concludes: "But if you do not want to respond to me, at least respond to Plato. But behold, while I see you speaking—as it were—I soon find myself staring at twin faces—a wonderful sight—where I had only seen one. If I duly recognize friendly faces (*vultus*) I seem to see (*speculari videor*)—as in a mirror (*speculo*)—Lorenzo de' Medici's countenance (*ora*) in yours, and I seem to be rebuked by him similarly as by you. Therefore, once these twin faces have been doubled for you, salute them once again for me, that is the two whom just now I addressed as one, and whom I now address as two."[102] One immediately recognizes the same self-reflective rhetorical devices as in the previous letters to Cavalcanti; the person that Ficino sees is Cavalcanti's letter, and conversely he depicts his own person as his reply. Yet he includes another face in the mirrored reflections, Lorenzo's, which may be a simple way to greet and commend his two friends at once. After all, Ficino makes it clear that he was too busy working on his *Platonic Theology*, which he dedicates to Lorenzo, to be distracted with letters. But the letter nevertheless also further reveals how Ficino's Platonic style tries to convey how the madness of love blurs the distinctions between individuals, forcing Ficino to see double as Pentheus sees Dionysus in the *Bacchae*: two Giovannis or two Lorenzos, but one person.

Ficino also finds sources for inspired and intoxicated Bacchic style in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Because Pseudo-Dionysius adopted the terminology of late ancient Platonists, notably from Proclus, scholars now date his writings to a later period. Ficino does not realize that Dionysius is a pseudonym and still thinks that the author is Paul's convert (from Acts 17:34), yet Ficino is nonetheless acutely aware of the similarities between Pseudo-Dionysius's and the Neoplatonists' philosophical style and terminology. In his commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology*, dedicated in 1492 to Lorenzo's son, Car-

dinal Giovanni de' Medici, the future Pope Leo X, Ficino introduces the work with a discussion of style and love's intoxication:

> The ancient theologians and the Platonists believe that the spirit of the god Dionysus dwells in the ecstasy, the ecstatic departure, of separated minds, when partly out of inborn love and partly with the god prompting them, they have surpassed the natural limits of understanding, and are wondrously transformed into the beloved god. Then with a new draft of nectar and with unconscionable joy they reel as though they were intoxicated bacchantes. With this Dionysian wine, therefore, our inebriated Dionysius runs riot everywhere: he pours forth enigmas, he sings in dithyrambs.[103]

Ficino characteristically puns on the names Dionysus and Dionysius, claiming that Pseudo-Dionysius's drunken and inspired state transforms him into the god Dionysus. The transfiguration of Dionysius, as it were, into Dionysus transforms his style so that he becomes a reveler singing in dithyrambs in the god's thiasus, not unlike the ispired Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, who also sings in vatic dithyrambs.[104] Immediately afterward in the commentary, Ficino expresses the difficulty of imitating Pseudo-Dionysius's vatic, even Orphic, style in his own Latin translation, and prays that God might illuminate his commentaries and translation just as he did for Pseudo-Dionysius when he interpreted the prophets and apostles.

Ficino reflects once more on his own Platonic style in another letter to Bernardo Bembo, on 3 November 1480: "When I wished in the preceding days to exhort my friends to the ardent love of true virtue while being as brief as possible in my discourse, I attempted to paint with certain Platonic colors—as I am often wont to do—the image of a beautiful mind from a certain resemblance befitting a beautiful body. But when I attempt to express the same image of a beautiful body and mind, while painting, on account of my inexperience and ignorance of painting, I express not so much the image itself, which I aimed at depicting, than its resounding shadow."[105] Ficino makes it clear through his employment of a synaesthetic auditory/visual figure of a resounding shadow that the painted shadow in this case is both the letter itself and Ermolao Barbaro conveying the letter to Bembo in Venice. Ficino tells Bembo that if he inspects the shadow he will begin to see himself in this other person. If Ficino's skiagraphia is not Platonic enough, he tells us that this technique of painting the human figure with shadows is in fact employing Platonic colors (*Platonicis quibusdam*, *ut*

soleo saepe, *coloribus pingere*). Ficino is therefore employing the same common rhetorical terminology for features and colors that his humanist contemporaries were using to describe various styles in their Ciceronian debates.[106]

Ficino capitalizes on a scribal mistake in a letter to one of his most important patrons, Filippo Valori (1456–94) to make a similar point. Having accidentally begun to write the name of another prominent Florentine, Filippo Carducci, instead of Filippo Valori, Ficino or his scribe merely crossed out the mistaken last name, writing: "Marsilio Ficino sends his greetings to Filippo ~~Cardu~~ Valori. Look Filippo! As I was about to write 'to Valori,' I almost wrote 'to Carducci.' Is this any wonder? The truth is, both of you are one to each other and you are both one to me. So it even happens that when I play the lyre or sing, one of you plays with me and the other sings."[107] Although the most commonly cited printed edition of Ficino's *Opera omnia* no longer preserves the canceled name, the manuscripts of Ficino's letter make it clear that he wished the letter to be copied and circulated with the erased name "~~Cardu~~." Adding to the image of the three friends in musical harmony, Ficino ends the letter by relating that he will soon travel with Valori in the Florentine countryside from Careggi to Maiano. Although Ficino could have followed Valori to his destination it is clear that the "Ficino" going to Maiano is in fact the letter itself being carried by Francesco Berlinghieri (1440–1500), another Florentine nobleman: "But since there is change in all things, I shall soon go to Maiano with you as my guide, but lest something hides from you, when you read 'I' you ought to understand Berlinghieri also as though under a greater 'I.'"[108] The letter's conjoining of persons, Carducci and Valori on the one hand and Ficino and Berlinghieri on the other, demonstrates how Ficino employed the rhetorical devices of his Platonic letters to build social communities and networks. Ficino ends the letter by asking Valori to send his greetings to the members of their Academy, to their *compatres* Giovanni Battista Buoninsegni (1453–1512) and Jacopo Guicciardini (1422–90), as well to their *confratres*. The very short letter reveals two stages of rhetorical play. First, Ficino plays with his authorial persona (the writer) and his epistolary or public persona (the written letter itself). Second, he plays with the letter's written and oral natures. One can easily recognize how, on the one hand, Valori's reading is visual insofar as he needs to see the scribal error in the recipient's name to conflate the persons of Valori and Carducci, but on the other hand his reading is also aural to the extent that it is understood that Berlinghieri is intended to read the letter aloud in order to join the two persons into one, that is Ficino's written "I" and the "greater I" (*ubi legis ego quasi sub grandiori quodam egone Berlingherium subintellige*) that emerges from Berlinghieri's oral

delivery of the letter. Berlinghieri is thus tasked to speak the letter in the persona of Ficino, or *ex persona Ficini*, as Ficino would have expressed the technique. In the letter's performance before Valori, Ficino's authorial persona and Berlinghieri's oratorical persona harmonize together in a manner similar to when Valori and Carducci sing and play the lyre with Ficino, which is a direct allusion to Plato's juxtaposition of Theodorus's ability to compare Socrates' and Theaetetus's faces to a musician judging whether two lyres are in harmony (*Tht.* 144d–e).

Ficino also restages similar synesthetic mixings of oral and visual performances for other epistles by his letter's carriers, as he did with Berlinghieri, to solidify his Platonic persona with other addressees. In fact, Filippo Valori, formerly the recipient, played the part to deliver a letter to Giovanni Pico in 1488:

> Lest you ever say that Marsilio, who is your first friend, came to you last, behold he has come. Contemplate (if you wish) the face (*vultus*) and gestures (*gestus*) of he who at present salutes you. But meanwhile closely inspect what hides under the mask (*sub persona lateat*). You will say, am I not contemplating youthful features instead of Marsilio's face? But Pico (if you are unaware) the suppliant Ficino was recently rejuvanated just like an eagle. Yes, indeed this prayer has been granted. What about his gestures (*gestus*), however? According to what reason has he now been made younger but also heavier (*gravior*)? O my friend, as with such serious (*gravibus*) prayers it has been just now finally granted that he exchanges youth for old age, so it is not so strange that this man praying so seriously thence turned out both younger and heavier at the same time. Indeed, this has come about, but why is he wearing especially the face (*vultus*) of Filippo Valori? I pass over for the moment what exact form was chosen by Love.[109]

Other than Ficino's characteristic use of "Platonic" puns (*Valori*, *valore*, *vale*/*gravior*, and *iunior* for light-hearted seriousness, as well as jokes about Valori's age and weight), Ficino's letter reveals further tropes of serioludere that depend on the letter's oratorical delivery (*gestus*)—a technical rhetorical term used by Cicero, Quintilian, and other ancient rhetoricians.[110] Ficino plays on the identification of his letter's authorial persona with Valori's oratorical persona, and even with Valori's very face/mask. The letter exists for us as a written document, but in order for the rhetorical device to work one needs to imagine the letter's oral delivery: Valori reciting the letter face to face with Pico. Ficino invokes Eros as the god responsible for the transformation of external appearances, like a *spiritello*

hiding behind a mask (see Figure 7 above). Pico's response in turn appeals to his union with Ficino, whom he addresses as the father of the Platonic family, due to their participating in a common Saturnine intellect (νοῦς). Beneath the exterior persona one finds a Saturnine ingenium. Far from a correction of Ficino's invocation of love, Pico's turn toward Saturn would have greatly pleased Ficino, the Renaissance's greatest orchestrator of the notion of a melancholic and Saturnine genius.[111]

Ficino's rhetorical strategies are especially evident in letters that he writes to recipients who share a certain enthusiasm for Platonism. In these, he examines the various personae of the author, the letter, the messenger, and the recipient, and often postulates a divine principle of unification for the different personae (the One, Eros, Saturn, intellect, *spiritus*, soul). We can look at a final excellent example in this regard from his correspondence with Pierleone Leoni (also known as Pier Leone da Spoleto, c. 1445–92), the court physician of Lorenzo de' Medici, whom Ficino calls his "alter ego," along with his German humanist friend Martin Prenninger (1450–1501), known in Latin circles as Martinus Uranius. Lest Cavalcanti, whom Ficino designates as his unique friend (*amicus unicus*), think that he is the philosopher's sole beloved, Ficino also repeats this rhetorical stratagem with other close correspondents. In fact, by 1491 he would also refer to Prenninger with the same epithet, "amicus unicus."[112] Thus Cavalcanti, Pierleone, and Prenninger had to share the roles of being Ficino's "alter egos" and/or "unique friends." On 12 May 1491 Ficino wrote to Pierleone a letter entitled "How someone thinking under another *persona* can encounter himself":

> In [your letters] you clearly write that when at first something Platonic occurs to you, Marsilio immediately comes to mind. But beware perhaps that you are not deceived by an exterior image. Indeed, I think that Pierleone himself is there lurking underneath the persona of Marsilio. For if any human species presents itself to you while contemplating Platonic matters, it is probable that it is the greatest Platonic species above all that presents itself. But what is more Platonic among human matters than Leo the great abode of the Platonic sun. Perchance, therefore, just like Narcissus, you are admiring yourself, when you think that you are admiring another. But Love clothes you especially in the image of Marsilio. But since we have happened upon the image, you surely know that reason is between the imagination and the intellect, and that natural images flow into it from the source of the imagination, and that divine species flow into it from the intellect. On account of this does it

> not often happen that a certain divine species assumes the form of a certain natural image when it emanates to human reason, and so does not what is divine on the inside often appear as natural to the eyes of reason? What if a similar reason does not explain why Pierleone often meets himself under the mask (*persona*) of Marsilio?[113]

The Platonic, or Neoplatonic, emanative metaphysics is evident in the letter. It acts as a philosophical grounding for the imitative practices of Ficino's rhetoric and as a principle of unification for the identities of Ficino's and Perleone's persons. It further reveals how Ficino understood self-knowledge discursively on the one hand as an encounter with others, and on the other as a contact with the divine.

Ficino's epistolography plays with central epistemological problems concerning the intellect and its unity with what it thinks. The thesis of the unity of the intellect and its thinking has its clearest origins in Aristotle's *De anima*.[114] The fortune of this theory has a long and manifold history among Aristotle's many interpreters, much of which turns on the twofold nature of Aristotle's identity thesis, that the intellect somehow becomes like what it intelligizes so that, on the one hand, when it intelligizes something, a tree for instance, it takes on the form of the tree but, on the other hand, when it intelligizes itself, the intellect and its thinking are identical. Aristotle's thesis that the intellect becomes like and even identical to its thoughts becomes in Plotinus a core tenet of his epistemological and metaphysical theory that the hypostasis Intellect is identical to the intelligibles (one and many). In its Platonic appropriations, however, Aristotle's identity thesis does not necessarily lead to an epistemology that posits the human intellect as a blank slate capable of becoming like anything that it intelligizes. On the contrary, something of the divine intelligibles is communicated to all human intellects insofar as a portion of our intellects always touches the Intellect.

Thus Ficino's Platonic arguments in the previously quoted letter to Givoanni Cavalcanti, where Ficino recounts his philosophical discussions with Bernardo Giugni and Bartolomeo Fortini, can be distilled accordingly: the intellect is not only identical to its thinking, the human intellect becomes like the divine Intellect—like a form of divine painting—when it intelligizes. Here are Ficino's words: "From intellect to intellect, from light to light. How easily does this happen? Most easily: for on account of a certain natural relationship, visible light immediately illuminates a transparent medium when it is first clear and pure, and visible light forms it into this very form, and through its own form, it forms the forms of all visible things. Similarly, the intelligible and the hyperintelligible light, that is God, forms the transparent intellectual medium, when it is first

clear; it forms, I say, its form, and this is divine, and through this form, it forms all intelligibles into forms."[115] It is because of this common participation in the divine Intellect that humans can truly know one another. Ficino is not simply appealing to fairly common Augustinian theories of divine illumination on human thought. In his explaining the identity of the knower both with the known and with the divine, it is apparent that Ficino draws directly on Neoplatonism. Beginning with Plotinus, the late ancient Neoplatonists themselves had long appropriated Aristotle's identity thesis between the intellect and what it thinks in order to argue that the Intellect qua hypostasis is identical to the intelligible forms. What is more, by his calling God hyperintelligible it is also clear that the explanation Ficino offers is based on a Neoplatonic philosophy of emanation. Even though the Neoplatonic Intellect is the first being, it is nevertheless posterior to the One. Ficino's God is thus akin to the One as hyperintelligible and thus also, to use the language of Proclus, beyond being, or *hyperousios*. The exercise in Socratic self-knowledge of Ficino's Platonic epistolography reveals that when one knows oneself through knowing another, one also begins to know God. Instead of positing that one knows others as though they were painted images external to us, like separate objects, in his correspondence Ficino expresses the unification of persons according to an identity thesis between intellect and what it intellegizes—all the while distinguishing his thinking from the Averroist theory of the single intellect. Ficino appreciated Plotinus's description of the Intellect as a many-faced or innumerably-faced being, glowing with individual living faces.[116] The communicated participation between two persons and God, both visual and sonorous, is expressed according to a metaphysics of light, which Ficino often understands according to geometrical optics whereby a voice is projected on a linear vector to touch its listener like a ray of light extending a transparent medium (*diaphane*).[117] Ficino becomes like his interlocutors in his letters, and in turn, following the goal of deification or assimilating to the divine in the *Theaetetus*, he becomes like God.

At first glance one can understand Ficino's Platonic letters as a correspondence network strengthening the social bonds of fifteenth-century philosophers, theologians, poets, statesmen, and scholars. That is, they simply perform a literary game in which members of an inner circle of elites are cast in roles played for their own amusement. They do indeed form a network of connections. In a famous letter to the aforementioned Martinus Uranius, Ficino catalogues a long list of his friends for his German correspondent. He classifies them into three kinds (*genera*): first, his Medici patrons, which he characterizes as a race of heroes; second, auditors (*auditores*), who are not necessarily disciples but friendly acquaintances and partners in dialogues who share a common bond in

the liberal arts (included in this group are the likes of Naldo Naldi, Cristoforo Landino, Leon Battista Alberti, Platina, Demetrius Chalcocondyles, Poliziano, Pierleone Leoni, and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, to name a few); and third, auditors who are Ficino's students and disciples (including the likes of Filippo Valori and Filippo Carducci, Giovanni Nesi, Giovanni Guicciardini, Francesco Cattani da Diacceto, and Niccolò Valori).[118] Documenting the interlocutors who participated in the epistolary games Ficino played, this letter certainly records the long reach of his cultural influence in his own day. The particular rules of the game are not arbitrary, however. The letters constitute a discursive process that encourages one to reflect Socratically on self-knowledge as an engagement with another. Ficino explicitly formulates this exercise in self-knowledge as something like a network uniting humanists—*liberalium disciplinarum communione*—in a common Platonic republic of letters: "For since neither should I nor would I ever want to be away from my friends, and since my very self is not only in Italy in me myself, but also in you in Germany, it is appropriate that I desire my friends here to be there also with me. Know that all these friends have been vetted with respect to their ingenium and character."[119] Playing variations on similar rhetorical themes of philosophical love, very often a letter's author's absence also leads Marsilio to reflect on Plato's famous sayings on orality and writing at the end of the *Phaedrus*. Like Plato's dialogue, Ficino's letters exhibit dialogic traits: on one side of the coin, Ficino studies the consequences of the written rhetorical persona to reveal the existence of an interior prediscursive self that participates in a divine principle of unification; on the reverse side, however, the very same letters also present Ficino's discursive exterior public persona with the mask of the Platonic philosopher.

Once more a comparison to later Renaissance depictions of Socratic philosophy is appropriate. In a painting by Pietro della Vecchia (1603–78) Socrates and a pupil, likely Theaetetus, study the similarities and differences in each other's faces (Figure 9).[120] There are differences between della Vecchia's painting and Plato's *Theaetetus*. Unlike the figures in the painting, Socrates and Theaetetus have snub-nosed faces. In the dialogue, Theaetetus has just oiled himself in a gymnasium, while in the canvas he is fully clothed—and not in ancient Greek garb. The painting is therefore not an exact realistic representation of the dialogue's dramatic setting. Still, even if della Vecchia does not depict Socrates and Theaetetus's physical likenesses, he (like Ficino's letters) depicts their philosophic and dialogic roles. Their glances meet in the mirror, showing that a shared attention and dialogue with one another unites them in their self-knowledge.[121] A third figure meets the gaze of the viewers of the canvas, inviting them into the same discursive process of self-knowledge. His hand holds a book in one version and a

FIGURE 9. *Socrates and Two Students (Know Thyself)*, by Pietro della Vecchia, c. 1650–60. Prado Museum, Madrid.

paper, perhaps a letter, in the other. Their exact contents are unclear, but philosophical elements are visible: geometric shapes, perhaps squares of opposition, or schematizations of arguments and concepts, as was fairly common in manuscripts and early modern books. These texts in the paintings are analogous to the canvases and face the readers/viewers as mirrors for their selves—mirrors that not only reflect external objects as though they were different images but also unify the reflected selves in the same way that the intellect ought to be identified with what it intelligizes when it self-reflects. Ficino's intimate letters to friends are of course intended for a wider audience. One imagines that Ficino would like his letters to attract the gaze of all readers who, when confronted with the reflections of Cavalcanti and Ficino, would also be faced with their own as though in a hall of mirrors.

CHAPTER 2

Ficino and the Platonic Corpus

> Moreover, one can certainly conjecture that the titles of these dialogues proceed in an ordered mode of succession from this reason, because the desire for the Good is inborn in all.
>
> Therefore in the *Phaedo* and the *Theaetetus* Plato says the soul's highest good is to be like God.
>
> —Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary*

Plato's Words: Divine or Confused?

Paul O. Kristeller's pioneering work on Marsilio Ficino characterized Ficino as both a philosopher and a humanist. Yet Kristeller also differentiated Ficino from his humanist contemporaries insofar as he thought Ficino was primarily a systematic metaphysician, whereas other humanists were only thinkers of moral philosophy, one of the five disciplines in his definition of the *studia humanitatis*. His approach—sometimes mischaracterized and misinterpreted—is still very much present in the study of Renaissance humanism and philosophy in general, and Ficino and Plato in particular. In the hands of others, Kristeller's categories have sometimes had the net effect of classifying humanists only as rhetoricians and of isolating Ficino.[1] On the one hand, researchers of humanist rhetoric and dialogue are often too quick to cast aside Ficino the philosopher, and on the other hand, scholars of Ficino all too often neglect the rhetorical facets of Ficino's work.[2] Yet Ficino is very much invested in rhetoric, primarily in studying Plato's own artistry and in forming his own oratorical and epistolary persona. In both cases, Ficino works with various rhetorical stratagems, but notably prosopopoeia

and enargeia—in other words, the fabrication and vivid presentation of personae. If one looks exclusively for narrowly defined elegantia in humanist rhetoric, one runs the risk of being blind to the sophisticated and philosophical aspects of Ficino's style.

These rhetorical stratagems also influenced Ficino's hermeneutical approach to Plato's style and corpus. Plato's style was not only the subject of ancient interpretation; his first translators in the Renaissance also discussed his prose, often in prefaces to their Latin translations of his works. As humanists honed their skills in Greek many soon began studying Plato, whose own prose seemed to evoke equal parts admiration and confusion in his first quattrocento readers. Many humanists would pick out scattered images, sentences, or small morsels of wisdom from Plato's dialogues for their florilegia, saving them to adorn their own writings or to support their future arguments with the weight of his authority. Others undertook a more sustained study of Plato. Leonardo Bruni, the brilliant humanist and translator of the *Phaedo*, *Crito*, *Apology*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, and *Letters*, remarked to Niccolò Niccoli (1364–1437) that Plato conveys divine opinions with a pleasant style, that nothing in his prose is forced, and that he expresses all with ease and grace.[3] This kind of praise for his style was common among many translators of Plato. After all, by lauding their chosen subject they in turn basked in his reflected glow. Along similar lines, Pier Candido Decembrio (1399–1477) wrote a few lines of praise in his preface to his translation of the fifth book of the *Republic* while employing the trope of inviting his reader to speak with Socrates: "His eloquence is brilliant to such an extent that he is held first among the Greeks no less for the charm of his style than the weight of his thinking. But more is said about this elsewhere, let us now hear Socrates speak."[4] Antonio da Rho (c. 1398–after 1450) might have been inspired by Pier Candido's actual opinions, since in his *Dialogorum in lactantium* the interlocutor Pier Candido, repeating Cicero and Quintilian's opinions, continues to admire Plato's prose: "Who would doubt that Plato himself was exceptional either in his sharpness of argument or in his ease of eloquence, which is a certain divine and Homeric style. For he greatly rises above the prose and style that the Greeks call pedestrian, as it seems to me that it does not come from a human ingenium, but yet from a certain Delphic oracle of God."[5] The stylistic considerations of Plato's prose by Latin humanists largely emerged either from the practice of doing their own Greek to Latin translations of some of Plato's compositions or from their readings of ancient opinions on Plato—for example, from Latin authors, such as Cicero and Quintilian, and Greek ones,

such as Plutarch (c. 46–120 CE), Dio Chrysostom (c. 40–c. 115 CE), and other second sophistic authors—many of whom compared Plato's abilities to Homer's.[6]

Two of Ficino's closest interlocutors, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Angelo Poliziano, also made similar comparisons between the stylistic qualities of Homer and Plato. Pico wrote to Ermolao Barbaro that Plato and Aristotle agree in doctrine but differ in style.[7] Ficino too says something similar in his preface to his commentary on Priscian Lydus on Theophrastus, claiming that he learned of their agreement from Themistius.[8] For his part, Poliziano, employing architectural metaphors in the preface to his Latin translation of the *Charmides*, writes that Plato is similar to ancient poet-theologians whose writings permit one to penetrate into the inner sanctum or adytum of wisdom:

> But this is certainly why those ancient theologians, Homer, Orpheus, Hesiod, Pythagoras, and also he himself about whom we are speaking at present, Plato, and many other divine mouthpieces of the true wisdom of the muses communicated that complex knowledge of all of philosophy through certain myths and symbols, as well as through concealing and disguising words (*involucra* and *integumenta*), and it is as though they barricaded their meaning with certain *cancelli* (or church screens), lest the religious mysteries of the Eleusinian deities become profaned, and lest they were to throw pearls to swine, as one is wont to say. For what the Pythagorean Lysis writes in his letter to Hipparchus is most true: "One who would intermingle divine speeches and thoughts with corrupt and obscene disturbances, acts in a contrary manner no less than one who pours out the most pure water into a muddy well; in disturbing the mud he contaminates the purity of the water."[9]

These quattrocento praises of Plato's writing refer to ancient comparisons between Plato's and Homer's abilities to tell readers that both ancient Greeks are capable of speaking from the perspective of the gods. Indeed, these comparisons from antiquity do nothing more than turn Plato's own judgment on its head regarding the poet's ability for divine prosopopoeia, that is, for speaking in the person of the Olympian gods. This is why Plato's ingenium is said to be their mouthpiece, like the Delphic oracle. Poliziano's metaphors from religious architecture reinforce this interpretation of Plato. A lexical or grammatical interpretation of Plato's text will always remain at the threshold, Poliziano reasons, while

figurative readings enter into the edifice but also establish boundaries, rood or chancel screens (*cancelli*), protecting the philosophical or even anagogical meaning of the dialogues (the Platonic adytum and altar, so to speak).[10] But, as Poliziano's metaphors imply, everyone knows that oracles do not speak clearly; they require interpreters. Or if one wishes to transpose the metaphor into Christian terms, as Poliziano himself does, intercessors or priests are required to serve as mediators with the divine.

Very early on in Plato's reception in the quattrocento, Latin humanists needed to address why, despite Plato's stylistic merits, so many of his interpreters debated his meaning. As we saw, one strategy was to turn any confusion into a positive judgment on his Homeric style, his divine ingenium, his oracular nature, or (as Poliziano mentioned) his Pythagorean wisdom. Yet not everyone was so easily convinced. Antonio Cassarino, for instance, who also translated the *Republic* into Latin, feared that few would appreciate Plato's style, since it is pleasing neither to humanists educated in the Latin eloquence of Cicero and Livy nor to scholastic philosophers accustomed to the clear precision and brevity of Aristotelian terminology.[11] The humanists not only had ancient examples of praise of Plato's eloquence, they also had ancient precedents that judged his style to be confused. The most common of these would have been Augustine. In the *De civitate Dei*, after stating that Plato joined Socratic practical philosophy with Pythagorean theoretical philosophy, Augustine writes that Plato's confused use of dialogic personae conceals his true doctrines: "For since Plato aspired to preserve the most notorious practice of hiding his knowledge and opinions of his master Socrates, whom he makes an interlocutor in his books, and because this Socratic practice pleased Plato, the fact remains that it is not easy also to uncover Plato's own doctrines on important matters."[12] Augustine's response to Plato's style is essentially to characterize it as esoteric—although this intentional concealment does not have the same positive connotations as are seen in Poliziano's preface. Augustine famously praises Plato's preeminence over other pagan philosophers, and claims that among all philosophers the Platonists are the closest to Christianity. Yet Plato's confused esoteric style is also exceptionally dangerous insofar as it became a model for later Platonists' esoteric strategies. Platonic verisimilitude, Augustine writes, might resemble truth, but it is not the same thing as truth. In fact, Augustine thinks that because of their confused and esoteric doctrines, which often resemble Christianity, the Platonists, hiding their true opinion, can deceive and lead their readers astray from Christianity.

No one shaped Plato's reception in the Latin West more than Augustine, but perhaps the strongest accusations against Plato's confused style in the quat-

trocento came from the Greeks. The *De differentis* of Georgius Gemistus Pletho (c. 1355–1454) raised the stakes in the Latin West by sending the first volley in a series of exchanges, commonly known as the Plato-Aristotle controversies, that were largely contested between Greek scholars and émigrés.[13] There is no need to step into the fray to study the Byzantine origins of these debates or to survey the question as a whole, but I do wish to discuss briefly the exchanges from the second generation of the controversy, between George of Trebizond (1395–1472/3) and Cardinal Bessarion (1403–72), particularly because Ficino was aware of them, and it was George who, despite translating Plato's *Parmenides* and *Laws*, waged the Greek war on Plato on a Latin front.[14] Drawing on his native knowledge of Greek, his translations of Plato, and his studies of rhetoric and Aristotelian philosophy, George critiqued Plato in his *Comparatio Platonis et Aristotelis* (1458), among other reasons, for being an inferior philosopher to Aristotle (in the fields of rhetoric, dialectic, logic, natural philosophy, mathematics, and metaphysics), for being incompatible with Christianity, for being a hotbed of heresies and vices, and for having a confused style. George largely dismisses Plato's dialogic form, claiming that the argumentative method of Platonic dialectic is far coarser (*rudis*) than Aristotle's demonstrations and syllogistics. Addressing the question why Plato is famous for his style, George asks, "But where did Plato teach on rhetorical invention? Where did he communicate lessons on eloquence? Where on poetics? For this subject also concerns greatly what he says, did this scholar of myths teach anything about his own vigilance and expertise? But Aristotle opened the fonts of poetics and disclosed the rivers of oratory."[15] Similarly, if one studies and imitates Plato's prose, George believes, one realizes that Plato's elevated and sublime style is nothing more than a confusion of symbols and enigmas.[16] In comparing Plato to Aristotle, George in effect presents a dogmatic Plato who is inferior in rank to the dogmatisms of Aristotle and Christianity. In sum, George wrote that Plato's dialogues were poor teachers of style and philosophy, as well as being unorthodox or heretical works.

Bessarion, as everyone knows, responded. First writing the *In calumniatorem Platonis* in Greek and later composing and circulating the work with the help of Niccolò Perotti's (1429–80) Latin, he drew on a much larger corpus of Neoplatonic texts to come to Plato's aid. The broad strokes of Bessarion's response to George are to present a dogmatic Plato who, at the bedrock of his argument, is largely a Pythagorean who does not divulge all matters pertaining to the divine to the public. We have seen how Poliziano later adopts a similar strategy, but Bessarion goes much further. In the second chapter of *In calumniatorem Platonis*, responding to the charge that because of his enigmatic style

Plato does not write clear teachings in the manner of Aristotle, Bessarion, like Poliziano, quotes the famous pseudepigraphic letter attributed to the Pythagorean Lysis and written to a certain Hipparchus, who was condemned for having revealed the master's teachings to noninitiates.[17] Bessarion concludes his comparison of Plato with the Pythagorean motivations in the letter: "This *mos Pythagoricus* was guarded until Plato's time, and through all of the successors of his school. Plato also always protected this very truth itself most diligently. For Plato taught neither with books, but orally, nor about those matters, which he had taught, did he leave behind books. If he wrote something it is Socrates not Plato himself who speaks. Besides about divine matters he briefly transmits implicit and obscure teachings, which are not easily understood by reading."[18] To support his claims, Bessarion then appeals to Plato's famous (or infamous) supposed *Second Letter* to confirm this interpretation of Plato's oral teachings. Thus, the dialogic role of Socrates only comes into play for Bessarion as a cover to hide Plato's own unwritten Pythagorean doctrines. In arguing in this manner, Bessarion proleptically stole his adversary's weapon, that is, the accusation that Plato's writings were unclear or confused, and turned it against his critic by arguing for the philosophical virtues of Plato's enigmatic or esoteric style. To drive his point home to a Christian audience, Bessarion compares Plato's strategy to Matthew 7:6 (as Poliziano once more also does), where it is written that one ought not to give what is sacred to dogs, nor throw pearls to pigs. Plato, therefore, like a good Pythagorean, never wrote down his oral teachings explicitly; he did so only through symbols.

Ficino encompasses some of the same strategies as those listed above, but he is much more complete in trying to fit Plato's form of writing into a comprehensive hermeneutical understanding of his philosophy. For Ficino, Plato's style of writing and his chosen dialogic form are directly related to the dialogue's purpose. In a passage from the preface to his *Commentaria in Platonem*, addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici, Ficino describes Plato's prose as lofty and elevated, reaching sublime heights almost unattainable by human language. Like his predecessors, Ficino thinks Plato calls down the heavens in his writings "as lofty thunder."[19] Ficino's humility regarding his incapacity to imitate fully Plato's Greek prose in his Latin translation, or to convey its qualities in his commentaries, only confirms how important Plato's style was to him. The description of Plato's prose as lofty and elevated dates back even earlier than its common occurrence among second sophistic authors, such as Dio Chrysostom, who would compare it to Homer's sublime style. After quoting in his *De vita Platonis* Aristotle's opinion, as recorded in Diogenes Laertius (fl. c. third century CE),

that Plato's style flows somewhere between oratorical prose and poetry and that Plato's writings are full of charm and abundance, Ficino also paraphrases Cicero's opinion from the *Brutus* that "if Jupiter wished to speak with a human tongue he would use no other tongue than the one with which Plato speaks," which is a testament to Plato's almost divine ability for prosopopoeia. Thus, like some of his humanist contemporaries, Ficino also compares Plato's style to Homer's capacity (*pace* what Plato says himself in the third book of the *Republic*) to give an adequate voice to the gods.[20]

Ficino also knows of the comparison by the Alexandrian Longinus (c. 213–73 CE) of the Athenian philosopher's prose with Homer's epos through the *In Timaeum* of Proclus. But because Proclus reiterates in the same breath the quotations from Longinus as well as Plotinus's opinion that Longinus may have been a philologist but not a philosopher, he reveals a Neoplatonic assessment of stylistic criticism. He does not altogether disregard Plato's style of writing but rather contends that by keeping his reading of the dialogues only to the level of textual interpretation Longinus misses the point of Plato's elevated style.[21] Proclus probably learned this interpretive approach from his teacher Syrianus († c. 437 CE), who saw in Plato's different uses of language evidence of divine inspiration, that is, moments often interrupting the dialogues' conversational logoi where Socrates launches into one of his many myths. These later Neoplatonists are not simply content to repeat tropes regarding the oracular or Homeric qualities of Plato's style. They compare different passages in the corpus where Plato's writing changes, and they interpret the philosophical significance of the different stylistic registers.

Hermias's prosopopoeic interpretation of Socrates' famous palinode from the *Phaedrus* is a prime example of this mode of interpreting the dialogues in Syrianus's school.[22] Hermias reminds his readers that after listening to Phaedrus deliver Lysias's speech that it is best to gratify the nonlover, and before reciprocating with his own discourse on how one ought to avoid the lover, Socrates covers his head and face in order to avoid the shame of the speech's subject matter.[23] Thereafter, Socrates delivers the third speech of the dialogue in the persona of Stesichorus (c. 640–555 BCE), the famous lyric poet who was supposedly blinded for offending Helen with his poetry and who subsequently composed a palinode to recant this offense.[24]

It is mainly because of his assiduous study of late ancient Neoplatonists that Ficino goes beyond the traditional comparisons of Plato and Homer by quattrocento humanists and interprets philosophical meaning in Plato's myths. Ficino thus appropriates Hermias's reading of Socrates' speeches in his

commentary on the *Phaedrus*: "In all this, take note of the modesty of Socratic love; for Socrates begins with his head veiled since he is about to say something less than honorable."[25] Socrates uncovers his face for the second speech, a palinode and recantation to the gods, in which he proffers his myth of the charioteer and the celestial chain of divinities, revealing the heavens, the afterlife, the nature of soul, and its return to earth.[26] According to the logic of the interpretation, in the second speech Socrates' Stesichoran prosopon is turned forward to speak with the gods and to see into the future—as the *Timaeus* also explains is its purpose. Accordingly, Ficino and Hermias distinguish between the persona of shame through which Socrates pronounces his first speech, delivered not merely in dithyrambs but in hexameter, which Socrates ironically characterizes as divinely inspired, and the Stesichoran persona of the palinode, which they believe is actually divinely inspired. Ficino translated Hermias's commentary on the *Phaedrus* at an early stage in his career, probably to help him decipher Plato's writings. Its influence in seeing Socrates as a divinely inspired philosopher is felt not only in his own commentary on the *Phaedrus* but also in other writings where he recalled Hermias's opinion that Socrates was a soteriological figure sent down from heaven to save the youth.[27]

These prosopopoeic interpretations of Plato's corpus also clearly influenced Ficino's epistolary voice. Ficino turned to these ancient commentary traditions to help him conceive of his epistolary persona. For instance, in his commentary on the *Phaedrus*, Hermias speaks of Plato's use of prosopopoeia or personification (προσποιεῖται) for Socrates' change of register in order to compare the respective offenses and their resulting damages and pollutions (μόλυσμα) in the persons of Homer, Stesichorus, and Socrates: the first does not notice the offense and damage (blindness), the second notices both and is healed of his blindness through a palinode, and the third notices the offense, not against Helen but against Eros, and is healed through a recantation before any damage or defilement can happen to him.[28] In one of his Platonic letters to Cavalcanti, dated 15 October 1468, Ficino employs Hermias's interpretation of *Phaedrus* by including himself in the aforementioned company of poets: "Thus Stesichorus was more prudent than Homer, but wiser than both was Socrates. I was certainly less cautious than Socrates; may I not become more unfortunate than Stesichorus. Why do I say this? In truth, because I wrote a letter to you in the morning of the ninth day of this month to rebuke your long silence, in which I accused you of being untamable and the cruelest of all, and in the evening I was overcome with an adverse illness. On account of this, and dreading that an adversity hangs over me for vituperating a hero, I decided to compose a palin-

ode, albeit a brief one, to expiate my guilt."[29] Ficino's letters thus convey more than his mastery of Plato's corpus to his audience, they also portray him as a successor in ancient Platonic interpretive traditions.

Although Ficino is not the first in the Renaissance to address the question of Platonic style, he is a better reader of Plato's Greek corpus than other quattrocento humanists, insofar as he is the sole person to translate all the dialogues into Latin, and he is probably also the only one among his contemporaries to read the complete corpus in Greek. This is partially due to his access to manuscripts.[30] But, to undertake this comprehensive study of Plato, Ficino also turned to a much larger body of exegetical material on Plato's prose than his predecessors (much of which comes from late ancient Neoplatonism). Like Bessarion, Ficino saw Plato as a Pythagorean disciple.[31] Unlike Bessarion, however, Ficino does not simply interpret the Platonic corpus through a single dogmatic voice. He is sensitive to changes of stylistic registers and dramatic personae within the dialogic corpus itself. It is to Ficino's great credit that he neither ignores Plato's choice of writing styles by distilling the corpus solely into a list of dogmatic *sententiae* (although this is a strategy that he on occasion employs) nor condemns Plato for dialogic confusion (although he must have certainly felt perplexed at times by the dialogues' intricacies). Ficino certainly adorns his writings with Platonic images, but his rhetorical employment of Plato is much more complex and continuously cuts across his complete epistolography. Similarly, while Ficino does indeed pick out and repeatedly quote significant sententiae from Plato in his own writings, Plato's Neoplatonic interpreters also help Ficino aim at a comprehensive hermeneutics to study Plato's writings as a unitary corpus.[32]

Plato's Corpus: Ficino's First Translation of Ten Platonic Dialogues

Ficino famously prepared his first translations of a selection of Plato's dialogues for Cosimo de' Medici. What emerges from the brief *argumenta* and the preface that accompany these early translations is that Ficino might very well be the first philosopher in the Latin West, at least since antiquity, to interpret Plato's works as a coherent and singular corpus.[33] Ever since Schleiermacher's influential hermeneutical analysis of Plato in the early nineteenth century, a dominant approach for interpreting Plato has been to understand all his dialogues as a singular corpus, that is, each dialogue ought to be read in view of the Platonic corpus as a whole, and vice versa. Since then, scholars undertaking the study of Plato's

complete works have often been concerned with questions of authenticating a canon of dialogues (and letters) and of establishing their order (chronological, pedagogical, or philosophical). Most interpreters of Plato, especially in Anglo-American scholarship, now adhere to a general developmental approach toward organizing Plato's works. That is, even contemporary studies of Plato that do not explicitly argue for a developmental interpretation of the corpus often implicitly believe that one can divide the dialogues into an early period (Socratic or aporetic dialogues), a middle period (dialogues that argue for classic Platonic doctrines like recollection and the immortality of the soul), and a late period (where Plato is sometimes believed to have challenged earlier positions). These modern developmental categories were a feature of neither ancient nor Renaissance interpretations of the corpus.

The organization of Plato's dialogues and letters into a corpus is not new, however. It is reasonable to say in broad terms that in antiquity there were five major organizational approaches to the Platonic corpus. The earliest known is attributed to Aristophanes of Byzantium (c. 257–c. 180 BCE). While the exact nature of Aristophanes' organization is still somewhat unclear, it is reported that he grouped fifteen of Plato's dialogues into five trilogies based on dramatic principles. According to this model, for instance, the *Republic*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Crito* form a trilogy because the dramatic setting from the *Timaeus* encourages their association. The second approach to the corpus is that of Thrasyllus (fl. second half of the first century BCE), who was probably a court astrologer for the emperor Tiberius. Thrasyllus arranged the corpus into tetralogies, inspired by the Greek thematic grouping of three tragedies plus a satyr play. Certain dramatic themes encourage the association of four dialogues into a group. For example, the events and conversations leading to Socrates' death in the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* make a coherent group for Thrasyllus's first tetralogy.[34] The Thrasyllan order is also accompanied by subtitles, presumably to indicate the dialogue's particular subject matter. The *Meno*, for example, is also known by the subtitle *On Virtue*. The Thrasyllan corpus had an important legacy, since most of the manuscripts of Plato's works are organized into tetralogies that preserve the Thrasyllan subtitles. A third classification of the dialogues is according to character types, beginning with the classes of hyphegetic (doctrinal) and zetetic (inquisitive) dialogues, followed by other subspecies. Evidence of this arrangement for reading the corpus survives primarily in the Middle Platonist Albinus's *Prologue* and in Diogenes Laertius. The fourth prominent organization of Plato's corpus in antiquity comes from the Neoplatonist Iamblichus's arrangement of Plato's dialogues into a series of

ten, followed by two culminating dialogues: the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*. In Iamblichus's hermeneutics each dialogue also has a specific goal (or *skopos*) directing its philosophical purpose. This organizational unit became important for the philosophical and pedagogical needs of later Neoplatonic schools. A final interpretive strategy is to study Plato's use of prosopopoeia, that is, by interpreting the dialogic interlocutors, which some at times have understood to be Plato's spokespersons expressing various positions. To be more accurate, this hermeneutical approach does not necessarily organize the corpus into a particular order, and it seems to have found its way into the strategies of various ancient interpreters at different times.

It is important to realize that Ficino is familiar to various degrees with all these ancient interpretive approaches, appropriating some of their principles and methods while ignoring others. As will be seen below, his own manuscripts provide evidence for his study of ancient interpretive traditions. For instance, the Greek manuscript containing the complete Platonic corpus that Cosimo gave to Ficino introduces Plato's dialogues with a series of interpretive paratexts: Pythagoras's *Aurea verba*, Alcinous's *Didaskalikos*, Theon of Smyrna's (fl. c. 100 CE) *Mathematica*, Diogenes Laertius's *Life of Plato*, and Albinus's *Prologue*, as well as a number of marginal scholia.[35] Scholars have long overlooked the simple fact that Ficino often relied on these manuscript paratexts to orient himself in his studies of Plato. In fact, for Ficino the very nature of the material codex seems to be more than a transparent container of Plato's works. The form and organization of the manuscript codex bind together various hermeneutical traditions into a phenomenological unity, which establishes certain horizons for Ficino's reading experience. This is not to say that Ficino follows these different—at times conflicting—positions blindly or that he relies on all of them. What is important to observe is that his recovery and appropriations of these ancient interpretive traditions are also integral parts of his own hermeneutics of the Platonic corpus. Although his reliance on various ancient interpretive guides—scholia and pseudo-Pythagorean material, for instance—might not always appeal to present-day Plato scholars, his Platonic interpretations are nonetheless an important part of the fabric of the histories and traditions of Platonism, and cannot be ignored.

Scholarship has also been slow to recognize that Ficino had already interpreted Plato's dialogues as a unitary corpus with a particular order. Given the little that his medieval predecessors and even his contemporaries knew of Plato, this level of interpretative sophistication was quite a feat for his day.[36] His interpretation of the Platonic corpus is indeed closer to what modern scholars would call a unitary approach, but Ficino is nonetheless aware of certain developmental

features of Plato's works. First, he knows of an old tradition that identifies the *Phaedrus* as Plato's first and most youthful composition.[37] He also indicates in his commentary on the *Symposium* that he has discovered a certain development in Plato's epistemology regarding how he thinks humans receive knowledge of the ideas. He traces Plato's philosophy from an earlier position that argues that humans comprehend by way of reasons inborn in their intellect to a later theory that humans comprehend by way of divine illumination: "In what manner, moreover, are such reasons in the intellect? The answer varies in Plato. If one were to follow the books that Plato wrote when he was young, the *Phaedrus*, the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, one would just think therefore that they were painted onto the substance of the intellect, as though they were figures on a wall, which is what we often held in our earlier discussions. And it also seems to be mentioned here [i.e., in the *Symposium*]. In the sixth book of the *Republic*, however, that divine man brings the whole matter out into the open, and says that the light by which our mind understands all things is God himself, by which all things are made."[38] In this passage, the interlocutor in Ficino's dialogue-commentary on the *Symposium*, Tommaso Benci (speaking in Socrates' place in the banquet), relates that the *Symposium*'s epistemology has much in common with the *Phaedrus*, the *Meno*, and the *Phaedo* concerning the presence and recollection of innate ideas in our intellect. It differs from the *Republic* where Plato argues for an epistemological theory of transcendental illumination and emanation from the Good. Benci's elaborations make it clear that Ficino has Plato's allegory of the cave and the divided line in mind. To Ficino this change in Plato's epistemological theory of ideas not only indicates a chronology for Plato's compositions but also suggests, as I argue in Chapter 4, a change in Plato's prose to a register that corresponds to Pythagorean philosophy and anticipates the Neoplatonists. In this *Symposium* passage Benci presents the second theory as a fulfillment of the first. As far as I can tell, this developmental approach toward Plato's epistemology seems to be Ficino's own invention.

In addition to the belief that Plato wrote the *Phaedrus* in his youth, and that one can chart a development in Plato's epistemology, Ficino agrees with the older tradition that Plato composed the *Laws* last in his old age. Like Thrasyllus, Ficino places the *Laws* (followed by the *Epinomis* and the *Letters*) in the last place of his order as it is found in the 1484 and 1491 editions, but he does not follow Thrasyllus's sequence otherwise. Ficino's decision to place the *Laws*, the *Epinomis*, and the *Letters* as the culmination of the Platonic corpus is likely deliberate, since it is precisely in these very works that Ficino believes Plato com-

municates his thinking in his own persona. Schleiermacher, the first major modern interpreter to arrange the corpus into a developmental order, interestingly also began with the youthful *Phaedrus* and placed the *Laws* last in his third and final period. This is not to say that Schleiermacher follows Ficino's approach to the corpus, even if the comparison shows an unexpected commonality in a long-lasting and traditional perspective on Plato.[39] Schleiermacher, like Ficino, did not finish all of his planned translations of and commentaries on the dialogues. The grand hermeneutical design Ficino had to edit and print a unitary corpus remained unfinished at his death. Evidence remains, however, for the way in which he conceived of the unitary Platonic corpus in the first group of dialogues translated for Lorenzo's grandfather Cosimo in 1464, which also remain the first ten dialogues of the 1484 and 1491 editions.

There is no need to retell and examine in detail the story that has been recounted since its first modern retelling by Arnaldo della Torre about how Cosimo requested a translation of Plato from Ficino. Indeed, the story is as old as the Renaissance itself.[40] It is, however, worth recalling that much of the content in this narrative, which has become central to modern histories of Renaissance Florence, comes largely from Ficino himself. If we believe that Cosimo's letter to Ficino, entitled *On Desiring Happiness*, of January 1464 is authentic, an aging Cosimo approaching death asked Ficino to join him at his villa in Careggi and to bring with him his Orphic lyre and the *Philebus*, the dialogue on the highest Good, in order to learn the way to happiness.[41] Ficino responded that he would meet him soon, in a letter entitled *The Way to Happiness*, on Platonic happiness, which concludes with *Theaetetus* 176a–c: "For thus our rational soul flees to become like God, who is wisdom itself. Indeed, Plato thinks that the highest level of happiness (*beatitudinis*) is this assimilation to God."[42] Ficino, however, was apparently unable to reach Cosimo. He wrote back that he had finished nine short works by Plato and that, "God willing, he would also translate an additional three more that seem to examine the highest order."[43] Another document, the preface to Xenocrates' *De morte* composed for Cosimo's son Piero (1416–69), is also important for establishing Ficino's early work on Plato. In the preface Ficino writes that Cosimo had asked him to translate from Greek to Latin ten Platonic dialogues and one book by Mercurius (that is, Hermes Trismegistus), and that having read them all—and only twelve days after finishing the *Parmenides*, which Ficino characterizes as the dialogue on the One principle of all things, and the *Philebus*, which he calls the dialogue on the highest Good—Cosimo passed away, on 1 August 1464. As Ficino says, he left the

shadow of this life and, having been called back whence he came, entered into the supernal light.[44] Ficino's work on these Platonic dialogues survives in a manuscript now in Oxford's Bodleian Library, copied in haste by seven scribes (as Kristeller has suggested) probably for the dying Cosimo himself, and in two further fragments of drafts of the argumenta now in Paris and Parma.[45]

Despite apparently finishing the translation of Plato's complete corpus five years later, in 1469, Ficino waited until 1484 to publish them with a printer in San Iacopo di Ripoli.[46] Even then he did not stop working on the dialogues. A second corrected edition was printed in Venice in 1491. In the 1484 and 1491 editions Ficino largely accepts as authentic the same dialogues as Thrasyllus, but he ignores Thrasyllus's order, even though his primary manuscript follows it. He does not think the *Clitophon* and *Letter XIII* are authentic, and of the other dialogues indicated as spurious by Diogenes Laertius—the *Demodocus*, the *Sisyphus*, *Eryxias*, *Axiochus*, *Alcyon*, *De iusto*, and *De virtute*—he translates only *Axiochus*, but attributes it to Xenocrates (probably on the authority of Diogenes Laertius).[47]

It appears that Ficino was still dissatisfied with these first two editions of Plato (1484 and 1491), since he planned to prepare a monumental edition of the Platonic corpus. It would have included a revised translation of the dialogues and, intriguingly, have been arranged in a precise order, accompanied by short introductions and long commentaries for each dialogue.[48] Lorenzo de' Medici was supposed to finance the whole editorial scheme, but his early death in 1492 canceled their ambitious plans. Ficino had to content himself with publishing a revised edition of his still incomplete commentaries on Plato in 1496, three years before his own death.[49]

One can hypothesize how Ficino would have ordered the corpus, but it seems that all there is to work on from the period are two letters accompanying the 1496 edition. In the dedicatory letter to Niccolò Valori, Ficino argues that he has arranged the corpus (*catalogus dialogorum omnium Platonicorum*) in order (*ordo*; *dispositio*). The first five dialogues follow the order of the universe (*ordinem universi*): *Parmenides* (on the One); *Sophist* (on being and nonbeing); *Timaeus* (on nature); *Phaedrus* (on the divine, nature, and man); and the *Philebus* (which also discusses all of the above). The rest of the dialogues, Ficino says, will be arranged in a certain human order (*humano quodam ordine*). There is further plausible evidence to think that this is more than wishful thinking, since, as I argue below, Ficino had already conceived of his first translations for Cosimo according to a specific dialogic arrangement (*ordo*). This is further cor-

roborated by the terminology employed in the second letter, to Paolo Orlandini, accompanying the 1496 edition. It explains Plato's and Ficino's views on happiness following a virtue theory very similar to that which Ficino employs in his interpretation of Plato in a number of earlier writings, namely, that Plato's philosophy prepares the inborn qualities of the intellect to receive the infused light of divine power or virtue to help it assimilate to God. To adumbrate the argument that I will soon make, in 1496 Ficino still thought—as I will argue in this chapter for his 1464 arrangement of the dialogues for Cosimo and in the next chapter for his *De amore*—that the correct reading and arrangement of Plato's corpus should prepare one for the goal of Platonism: to become godlike in a state of bliss.[50]

A few scholars have been puzzled both by the preface that Ficino addressed to Cosimo and by his choice and arrangement of these ten translations of complete dialogues.[51] A manuscript at Oxford preserves them in Ficino's specific order, along with their Thrasyllan subtitles as modified by Ficino. His three significant corrections are changing the *Parmenides* from *De ideis* to *De uno*; the *Philebus* from *De voluptate* to *De summo bono*; and the *Euthydemus* from *Contensiosus* to *De felicitate*. These changes in effect help communicate a Neoplatonic interpretation in three ways: Ficino presents the Neoplatonic reading of the *Parmenides* that it is about the One, he agrees with Iamblichus that the skopos of the *Philebus* is the Good, and he thinks that the *Euthydemus* is about happiness and virtue ethics.[52] The manuscript also includes his translations of Alcinous, Speusippus, and Pythagoras (which he prepared for Cosimo), and Xenocrates (which he later translated for Cosimo's son Piero). An argumentum for each dialogue precedes its translation. The contents of the manuscript are listed in Table 1.

To get beyond simplifications and generalizations it is necessary to analyze possible reconstructions of the work Ficino did on the first ten dialogues and consider more detailed sources for the Neoplatonic character of his decade's order. The first thing to observe is an interpretive problem that has largely gone unnoticed in three documents: his letter to Cosimo de' Medici of 11 January, his preface to Cosimo for his translation of ten complete Platonic dialogues, and his preface to Xenocrates for Cosimo's son Piero. In the preface addressed to Piero, Ficino writes that he translated ten Platonic dialogues, and scholars have rightly taken this to be the list of ten Platonic dialogues found in the Bodleian manuscript.[53] In his earlier letter to Cosimo, however, Ficino speaks not of completing a translation of ten dialogues but of having translated nine short Platonic works

Table 1. MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163

— *Argumentum Marsili Ficini Florentini in decem a se traductos Platonis dialogos ad Cosmum Medicem patrie patrem*	ff. 1r–2r
i) *Arg. in Hipparchum: De lucri cupiditate*	ff. 2r–5v
ii) *Arg. in librum de philosophia/Amatores*	ff. 5v–9r
iii) *Arg. in Theagem: De sapientia*	ff. 9r–14r
iv) *Arg. in Menonem: De virtute*	ff. 14v–30v
v) *Arg. in Alcibiadem primum: De natura hominis*	ff. 30v–45v
vi) *Arg. in Alcibiadem secundum: De voto*	ff. 45v–51v
vii) *Arg. in Minoem: De lege*	ff. 51v–57r
viii) *Arg. in Euthyphronem: De sanctitate*	ff. 57r–64v
ix) *Arg. in Parmenidem: De uno*	ff. 65r–87v
x) *Arg. in Philebum: De summo bono*	ff. 88r–113r
— *In Eutydemo: De Felicitate* *Inc*. Plato in Eutydemo de Felicitate, hec ait omnes homines bene agere hoc est bene vivere volumus. *Des*. Sic enim animus noster deo qui sapientia ipsa est evadit simillimus in qua quidem similitudine summum Plato consistere gradum beatitudines arbitratur.	ff. 113r–13v
— Excerpts-summary related to *Euthydemus* 278e–82a.	
— *In Teeteto: De scientia* *Inc*. Mala radicitus extirpare / *des*. cum sapientia sanctitas. The passage corresponds to *Theaetetus* 176a–c	ff. 113v–114r
— *Alcinoi liber de dogmatibus Platonis*	ff. 114r–132v
— *Speusippi de definitionibus Platonis*	ff. 132v–136v
— *Pythagoras Aurea verba*	ff. 137r–37v
— *Pythagoras de symbola*	ff. 137v–38v
— *Preface to Piero de' Medici*	ff. 138v–39r
— *Xenocrates, Axiochus: De morte*	ff. 139r–43r

and exerting himself to finish three more.[54] Most have read this to mean that by the time he wrote to Cosimo, Ficino had completed nine of his ten dialogues, and that the three other works he mentions correspond to a tenth dialogue, as well as the *De dogmatibus Platonis* (often known as the *Didaskalikos*) by the second-century CE Middle Platonist Alcinous and the *Platonic definitions* supposedly written by Plato's disciple and nephew Speusippus (c. 408–339/8 BCE)—both of which are in the Bodleian manuscript. This would agree nicely with Ficino's statement to Cosimo in his preface to his ten dialogues: "Therefore, happy Cosimo, accept twelve Platonic books, namely, ten of Plato's dialogues and the two works by the Platonists Speusippus and Alcinous."[55] This is perhaps likely, but it is not absolutely certain.

For one thing, if these twelve Platonic works correspond to the ten Platonic dialogues as well as the works by Alcinous and Speusippus, Ficino would have left out of his description in the letter to Cosimo the excerpts of the *Euthydemus* and the *Theaetetus* as well as the final translations of Pythagoras's *Aurea verba* and *Symbola*—all of which are in the Bodleian manuscript. When taken into account these other texts bring the total number of works that Ficino translates in this manuscript for Cosimo (depending on how one counts the Pythagorean works) to fifteen—that is, if one also keeps in mind that Xenocrates was added to the end of the manuscript at a later date for Piero de' Medici.[56] In fact, it is possible that the three Platonic works Ficino mentions in his letter to Cosimo are not a final tenth Platonic dialogue, along with Alcinous and Speusippus, but simply three other Platonic dialogues added to the nine dialogues that he had already finished translating. According to this hypothesis he would have wanted to translate twelve dialogues and not ten (as is normally repeated). Since in the letter in question to Cosimo he writes that these last three works speak of the highest order of things—which would be a very odd way to characterize Speusippus's rather scholastic definitions, that is, if one wishes, as the usual hypothetical reconstruction posits, to count it among the three works mentioned in the letter to Cosimo—they would have included the *Philebus* and the *Parmenides*, as well as a third, which might have been the *Theaetetus*.[57] And since he finally completed the translation of the *Parmenides*, the *Philebus*, and eight other shorter dialogues for Cosimo, the twelfth dialogue would probably have been another shorter dialogue, which might have been the *Euthydemus*.

This second hypothesis would agree with the fact that the Bodleian manuscript contains Latin excerpts of the *Theaetetus* and the *Euthydemus* after the completed translation of ten dialogues, but it too is not absolutely certain. To recap, while he was in the process of translating his intended dialogues and probably when he was preparing the requested Latin manuscript in haste, Ficino wrote to Cosimo: "So far I have translated nine works of Plato. I will, God willing, translate three other works that survey the higher order of things."[58] That he was in a rush to complete his work is evident from his statement that after finishing nine works by Plato, "God willing," that is, if time permitted, he would translate three more. Could it be that Ficino was also planning on translating the *Theaetetus* and the *Euthydemus* but ran out of time, settling for including only brief excerpts of the two dialogues in the manuscript?

The question cannot be definitively answered, but there are persuasive reasons at least to connect the fragmentary translations of the *Euthydemus* and the *Theaetetus* in the Bodleian manuscripts and Ficino's aforementioned letter

to Cosimo.[59] In that letter Ficino tells Cosimo that while he waits for his translations of Plato he can happily read new material by Plato on happiness. He explains that Plato teaches about happiness (*beatitudinem*) for the active life in the *Euthydemus* and for the contemplative life in the *Theaetetus*. He then quotes two passages from these dialogues identical to those in the Bodleian manuscript.[60] In explaining that happiness resides in becoming godlike, he ends this letter to Cosimo by drawing parallels between the highest Good in the *Philebus*, the One in the *Parmenides*, the King and Father in the *Second Letter*, and the Good itself in the *Republic*. He concludes by arguing that Plato's happiness is neither identical to Diogenes Laertius's opinion that it should be thought of in terms of our happy fortunes nor, as the Peripatetics think, that it is the source of goodness in the order of ideas, but that it is found above ideas, intellect, life, and essence. Cosimo knew about peripatetic ethics, since he supported the work of John Argyropoulos (c. 1415–87) on Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, and about Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Philosophers*, as he commissioned Ambrogio Traversari (1386–1439) to translate it.[61] In his letter Ficino is therefore appealing to these items of interest to Cosimo, but he does so in order to claim the superiority of Plato's divine ethics. The letter's conclusion that Plato's highest Good and our happiness are above the ideas, and indeed above the intellectual triad of being-life-intellect, explicitly follows Neoplatonic philolosophy. It further helps us understand the philosophical hermeneutics behind Ficino's early translations for Cosimo.[62]

At first glance the dialogues for Cosimo share certain resemblances with the late ancient Neoplatonic corpus of Platonic dialogues used in the teaching curriculum of their academies. Historians of philosophy often speak of the teaching corpus established by Iamblichus as composed of ten Platonic dialogues, but in reality it is formed by a series of twelve dialogues: a first decade of dialogues, which interestingly ends with the *Philebus*, followed by the two "perfect" dialogues, the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*. The *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides* are two Pythagorean works, according to Iamblichus, that are by themselves supposed to encapsulate self-autonomously, as in a cosmos, the whole order of the prior dialogues.[63] Iamblichus's order for Plato's corpus can be reconstructed as in Table 2.

Iamblichus's organization was part of the teaching curriculum of the Platonic academies of late antiquity for more than two hundred years. Its influence was due in part to the fact that Iamblichus arranged this corpus and its study according to a specific order (τάξις), corresponding to the Neoplatonic hierarchy of virtues: political virtues dealing with the affairs of others, cathartic vir-

Table 2. Iamblichus's Order for Plato's Corpus

1st Order			Introduction:	i) *Alcibiades*	
	Political			ii) *Gorgias*	Ethical
	Cathartic			iii) *Phaedo*	
Virtues		on words		iv) *Cratylus*	Logical
	Theoretical	on concepts		v) *Theaetetus*	
			physics	vi) *Sophist*	Physical
	on things			vii) *Statesman*	
			theology	viii) *Phaedrus*	Theological
				ix) *Symposium*	
			Apex:	x) *Philebus*	
2nd Order				A) *Timaeus*	Physical
				B) *Parmenides*	Theological

tues concerned with the care of the self, and theoretical virtues that turn the mind toward the intelligibles so that it may reach toward the sight of the higher truths of the One-Good. In addition to the number of dialogues, there are other similarities between Iamblichus's and Ficino's orders. They both assign a privileged place to the *Philebus* as the tenth dialogue in the series. Likewise, they both categorize the *Sophist* as a "physical" dialogue, presumably because it deals with sensibles.[64] The similarities do not end there. In the argumentum to the *Parmenides* prepared for Cosimo to accompany its translation, Ficino writes:

> Since Plato sowed the seeds of all wisdom throughout all of his dialogues, in the *Republic* he harvested all the principles of moral philosophy, in the *Timaeus* all of the knowledge of nature, in the *Parmenides* he encloses all theology as a whole. . . . On account of this in the present dialogue [i.e., the *Parmenides*], first Zeno the Eleatic, the disciple of the Pythagorean Parmenides, proves that the One is in the sensibles, by showing that if these many were in no way participating in the One, a number of errors would follow. . . . One ought to pay attention to the fact that in this dialogue [i.e., the *Parmenides*] when Plato speaks of "the One" in a Pythagorean manner (*Pythagoreorum more*) it can signify any one substance completely free from mater, for instance, God, intellect, and soul. But when he speaks of "other" and

> "others" one can understand both matter and those [forms] that come to be in matter.[65]

Both philosophers, therefore, understand the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides* as complementary Pythagorean dialogues: one dealing with questions of nature, the other with theological questions. Furthermore, like Iamblichus, Ficino arranges the corpus of dialogues according to a specific philosophical order. He writes in the preface to Cosimo:

> Moreover, one can certainly conjecture that the titles of these dialogues proceed in an ordered mode of succession (*successionis ordinem*) from this reason, because the desire for the Good is inborn in all. In truth, in their youth men, deceived by their senses and by opinion, think that the Good is the possession of wealth, whence they labor with all their force to attain it, and it is for this reason that the *De lucri cupiditate* [*Hipparchus*] is first. But since in advanced years and whenever prompted by reason they begin to love the knowledge of divine things as a good, and the love of wisdom is philosophy, the book *De philosophia* [*Amatores*] is assigned the following place according to this order. For this reason the book *De sapientia* [*Theages*] follows them, since wisdom is sought through love, before we can possess it.[66]

Also like Iamblichus, Ficino employs a tripartite Neoplatonic scale of virtues to explain the philosophical order. I continue where I left off from the preface:

> To this the *Meno*, or *De virtute*, is added, since the light of wisdom, when it first appears, establishes decorum with each power and motion of the rational soul (*animus*), which clearly is called by the name virtue. But virtue bestows three things on the rational soul, that it may revert to itself, that it may convert toward its cause, and that it may oversee things below it. Since clearly the rational soul is an intermediary nature between divine and bodily things, it is then provided with virtue, when it cares for its own nature and does not mingle with worse things, and when it is converted to superior truths, while not neglecting the providence of inferior things. So that it reverts to itself, the *First Alcibiades* presents the nature of man (*De natura hominis*), and so that it is turned toward supernal realities, the

> *Second Alcibiades* makes visible the subject of prayer (*De voto*), and so that it governs inferior things, the *Minos* expounds on law (*De lege*).[67]

Despite all these similarities, there is one fatal problem with the argument that Ficino followed Iamblichus's curriculum as we know it: namely, the fact that this specific order of dialogues is only available in one source text, the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Plato's Philosophy*, which is extant in only one manuscript—and there is no evidence that Ficino knew it. In fact, Ficino's order of dialogues is not identical to Iamblichus's. How, then, does one make sense of the fact that the schema that Ficino developed bears resemblances to a Iamblichean model without his knowledge of this single valuable manuscript that contains Iamblichus's precise order for the dialogues?

While Ficino might not have known the key source text with the exact list of Iamblichus's choice of dialogues, he did read, and eventually partially translate, another indirect source that testifies that Iamblichus arranged the dialogues in a specific order, without, however, providing a list of the exact dialogues: Proclus's commentary on the *First Alcibiades*. Here is the relevant passage from Proclus: "And it seems to me that for this reason the divine Iamblichus grants to the *First Alcibiades* the first place in the order (τάξιν) of the ten dialogues, in which he believes that the whole philosophy of Plato is contained, just as in a seed, in this way it anticipates altogether each of its developments. But which are the ten dialogues, in what manner is it proper to arrange them, and how in the two dialogues after them they are confirmed, I previously examined elsewhere."[68]

It is uncertain that Ficino knew of this passage before he translated Plato for Cosimo, but I still wish to make three points regarding Proclus's commentary on the *First Alcibiades*. First, Ficino does not follow Iamblichus in placing the *First Alcibiades* at the beginning of the series. Perhaps without knowing the other nine specific dialogues Ficino would not have been able to make sense of the Iamblichean series as a whole solely from Proclus's comments. Second, like Proclus, Ficino understands the *First Alcibiades* primarily according to the cathartic virtues of self-knowledge, serving as a protreptic turn toward higher things. Ficino, however, sets the *First Alcibiades* in the very middle of his decade, establishing it as a pivot point for man's soul to turn from the lower concerns of the earlier dialogues to the higher principles of the later dialogues. Ficino, therefore, reads the Thrasyllan subtitles in a similar way to how Neoplatonists, following Iamblichus, read a purpose (σκοπός) into each dialogue. The Thrasyllan subtitle of the *First Alcibiades*, *On Human Nature*, which the dialogue defines

as the rational soul, thus further establishes the analogy between the order of dialogues Ficino establishes and his metaphysical hierarchy, made famous primarily through his *De amore* and his *Platonic Theology*. The placement of the human soul as the central node (or *vinculum*) of the cosmos in Ficino's philosophy makes the soul capable of turning both downward to earthly concerns and upward to become like God. Ficino thus places Neoplatonic conversion (ἐπιστροφή) at the center of his metaphysics. He could have encountered explanations for Neoplatonic virtues in different texts, but the triadic structure that he gives in his preface to Cosimo and in his argumentum to the *First Alcibiades* closely resembles Proclus's explanations for self-reversion or conversion (ἐπιστροφή). Yet he did not need to learn this from Proclus's commentary on the *First Alcibiades*, since he had already studied it earlier in his youth in Proclus's *Elements of Theology*. He had a long-lasting engagement with this work. His first serious encounter with Neoplatonism involved the study of arguments surrounding proposition 15 on self-reversion (ἐπιστροφή) from the *Elements of Theology*.[69]

The third and final point that I would like to make about Proclus's commentary is that it could have inspired Ficino to present Cosimo with a specific dialogic arrangement: one that has a particular order, one that emphasizes the Neoplatonic hierarchy of virtues, one that employs the analogy between a textual corpus and human life, one that utilizes the Iamblichean hermeneutical principle that each dialogue has a specific skopos, or object and purpose, which in Ficino's arrangement largely corresponds to the Thrasyllan subtitles, and finally one that could be structured as a Iamblichean decade followed by two more dialogues (though Ficino would have ignored the specific titles and order for the complete series). This would have an incidental advantage of explaining why Ficino presented Cosimo with only ten dialogues instead of the twelve that he was preparing to translate, offering him only short passages from the *Euthydemus* and the *Theaetetus* for reasons that I will make clear shortly. This reconstruction must, however, remain only an improbable hypothesis for two reasons. First, one still needs to explain how the *Euthydemus* and the *Theaetetus* are related to the ten dialogues translated for Cosimo. Second, and most crucial of all, the specific Greek manuscript of Proclus's commentary on the *First Alcibiades* that Ficino consulted has not yet been identified, nor has it been established when he first made explicit use of this unidentified manuscript.

I have thus far worked through different hypotheses for the Neoplatonic reasoning behind Ficino's order for his first translation of a Platonic corpus for Cosimo, and considered possible reconstructions of Ficino's work on the first

ten dialogues: moving by process of elimination from the near impossible (Ficino's knowledge of the manuscript containing the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Plato's Philosophy*) to the possible but uncertain (Ficino's early knowledge of Proclus's *In Alcibiadem*). There is a third and much more definitive hypothesis that points to another certain source of inspiration for Ficino's work, for it is in fact possible to document Ficino's use at this early date of Iamblichus's large compendium of Pythagorean philosophy, the *De secta Pythagorica*. Sebastiano Gentile first argued that Ficino translated—or often paraphrased—the *De secta Pythagorica* before 1464, and in addition to my present argument, in Chapter 4 I put forward further corroborative evidence that Ficino labored over the *De secta Pythagorica* before 1464.[70] The fact that his close study of the *De secta Pythagorica* stands behind his early Platonic work for Cosimo does not exclude his possible use of other Neoplatonic texts, but it does provide an explanation for his Neoplatonic arrangement of this work that stands on its own based on structural and textual comparisons between his early work on the dialogues and the *De secta Pythagorica*.

Ficino's translation of *De secta Pythagorica* was thought to be lost before Kristeller identified it. Despite its rediscovery, Ficino's translation has never been edited or been the subject of extensive scholarly study, and most recent editions of Iamblichus ignore its existence altogether.[71] The use by Ficino of the *De secta Pythagorica* has been largely ignored compared to many other facets of his activities, and it is only recently that scholars have begun to study how important Iamblichus truly was for him.[72] Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica* apparently once contained ten volumes: (i) *On the Pythagorean Life*; (ii) *Protreptic to Philosophy*; (iii) *On General Mathematical Science*; (iv) *On Nicomachus's Arithmetical Introduction*; (v) *On Arithmetic in Physical Matters*; (vi) *On Arithmetic in Ethical Matters*; (vii) *On Arithmetic in Theological Matters*; (viii) *On Pythagorean Geometry*; (ix) *On Pythagorean Music*; and (x) *On Pythagorean Astronomy*. Of these only the first four, which Ficino translates, are extant. Volumes 5–7 were known and quoted by the Byzantine writer Michael Psellus (c. 1017–78) but have not come down to us otherwise. Although we do have a text entitled *On Arithmetic in Theological Matters*, it is almost certainly not the work of Iamblichus but a compilation of various tracts, as Dominic O'Meara has demonstrated.[73] The remaining three volumes of the *De secta Pythagorica* are missing.

The *De secta Pythagorica* has a specific programmatic order. It begins with *De vita Pythagorica*, which serves as a model for the exemplary and even miraculous life of the philosopher and his sect of followers. The *Protrepticus* comes

next. Through it the reader's soul is turned toward the study of philosophy, the moment of ἐπιστροφή, or conversion, when the prisoners in the cave turn their heads, so to speak. Thereafter the reader studies the general principles of mathematics in the *De communi mathematica scientia*, before turning toward the specific mathematical sciences, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. There is therefore, I believe, a series of analogies between the formal structure of the *De secta Pythagorica* and the disciplinary *cursus* from book 7 of the *Republic*. Of specific importance to my present argument is the second volume of the *De secta Pythagorica*, the *Protrepticus*.

Like the larger summa of Pythagorean philosophy, the *Protrepticus* follows a particular order. It contains a tripartite structure of exhortations to turn to philosophy that correspond to the triad of virtues: (i) turning away from the plurality of external things, (ii) turning toward philosophy and the care of the self or soul, and (iii) proceeding onward to the higher principles. Similarly, the *Protrepticus* consists first of exhortations based on general common notions, second of exhortations that mix general philosophical notions with Pythagorean ones, and third of particular Pythagorean exhortations. Iamblichus concludes the work with the longest list and commentary on the Pythagorean *Symbola* from antiquity, having also presented the *Aurea verba* a little earlier in the work.

Ficino imitates this Iamblichean structure when he concludes the Bodleian manuscript of his Platonic dialogues given to Cosimo with the capstone of his translation of the Pythagorean *Aurea verba* and *Symbola* (the *Axiochus*, to repeat, was added later for Piero de' Medici). Here is the concluding section of the preface for Cosimo, which immediately follows the last passage from it that I quoted above:

> For this reason, to these dialogues the *Euthyphro*, *On Holiness*, is added, since holiness is itself based on these three virtues [i.e., the virtues that are revealed in the ordered triad of the *First Alcibiades*, the *Second Alcibiades*, and the *Minos*], when the rational soul (*animus*) retaining its purity, turns back toward humanity in love and toward the divine in piety. But since the divine light flows into the intellect once it is purified with holiness, and God himself is made manifest in his radiance, it is apt that the discussion *On the One* principle of all things follows the book *On Holiness*, and for this reason the *Parmenides* follows the *Euthyphro*. And since our beatitude (or happiness, *beatitudo*) consists in the vision of God, it is only right that the

> *Philebus* or *On the Highest Good* for man seems to be located after the *Parmenides*, *On the Highest Good* for nature as a whole. After ten dialogues by Plato, I also gladly translated a book by the Platonist Alcinous, in which he briefly draws together Plato's entire doctrines, to which I also added the Platonist Speusippus's book *On Platonic Definitions*, as though with these two books Plato's thinking were grasped in a certain summa. I then added Pythagoras's *Golden Verses* and with them the *Symbola*, so that some of the thoughts of this man, whom Plato imitates above all, might be accessible to Latin speakers. This is the reason for my translations, for the title of the dialogues, and for the suitable order of succession of the related dialogues. But now let us turn to the *Hipparchus*, *On the Desire for Wealth*.[74]

One can see the formative influence of Iamblichus's *Protrepticus* throughout the structuring order of Ficino's series of dialogues. Following *De vita Pythagorica*, the *Protrepticus* is governed by a philosophical and ethical question: What style of life should one follow? Like Ficino's explanation for his corpus of ten Platonic dialogues, therefore, the *Protrepticus* is organized according to the model of a virtuous life, which should lead one away from a life of pleasure and avarice, to the true happy and blessed life, assimilating oneself to God as much as possible.[75] Iamblichus's order of ten Platonic dialogues for his school's curriculum begins immediately with the *First Alcibiades*' purgative conversion toward philosophy, yet Ficino's order begins instead with dialogues meant to refute worldly concerns, specifically avarice. Ficino's order of dialogues is therefore more akin to Iamblichus's *Protrepticus* than to his curriculum. Like the *Protrepticus*, Ficino directs the aims of his ten dialogues according to a particular order: a turning away (*conversio* or ἐπιστροφή) from the desire for wealth, to the love of wisdom, to wisdom, virtue, human nature, and onward to the One and the highest Good. Thus Ficino's order, again as in the *Protrepticus*, is structured as a conversion from desire for the plurality of goods in the world to a vision of, or even union with, the One true *Summum Bonum*. Ficino's corpus of dialogues also shares the *Protrepticus*'s utilization of the *Republic*'s analogy of the Sun and myth of the cave to explain Platonic participation in terms of metaphysics of light. Both the *Protrepticus* and Ficino's order of dialogues, therefore, also function according to the analogy between the virtue of eyes and its faculty, sight, and the virtues of men, which correspond in turn with the virtues of soul, that is, the faculties of reasoning and intellection. And like the *Republic,* the *Philebus*, and Ficino's dialogic order—and unlike the traditional Neoplatonic prioritization of the

Parmenides' One—the *Protrepticus* sets the Good as the highest principle. At their summits both Ficino's order and Iamblichus's *Protrepticus* propose the goal of the conversion to philosophy as becoming godlike and happy. A comparison between Ficino's translations of the relevant terminology for happiness as the assimilation to God in the *De secta Pythagorica* with his explanation for his philosophical ordering of the dialogues for Cosimo also demonstrates the close relationship between the texts. It shows Ficino's integration of various Greek and Latin terms (*felicitas*, *beatitudo*; εὐδαιμονία, μακαρία, and related cognates) into a single semantic field to speak about the divinization of man.[76]

It is clear that Ficino's employment of *beatus* (and the whole semantic field of related cognate variants like *beatitudo*) in his translation of μακάριος, εὐδαιμονία, and various other derived terms, aims neither at a simple and unphilosophical meaning for happiness, nor at conventional philosophical and ethical *eudaimonism*, nor even at a specifically Christian understanding of beatitudes; Ficino's writings express a particularly Neoplatonic understanding that the best life is the intellectual life of the philosopher. To this end, like Iamblichus in the *Protrepticus*, Ficino makes use of the famous passage from *Theaetetus* 176a–c, important to Middle Platonists and Neoplatonists alike for their virtue theories, that one ought to become like God as much as possible (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ τὸ δυνατόν).[77] Ficino thus directs the reader to the skopos of the Platonic corpus in the argumentum to the *Philebus*:

> Plato wrote the dialogue, the *Philebus*, according to a wonderful order. It is so clear that it doesn't really need a summary since Plato himself sets forth all his material and the order he's going to follow at the beginning of the debate, then midway he resumes it, then at the end he gathers it together. However, the book's object is to examine the highest good of the soul, which is called the highest good conditionally, since the principle itself of all things is called the highest good absolutely. So the conditional good is dealt with in this book, the absolute good in the *Parmenides*. However, just as a particular light depends on the fountain itself of all light, so the conditional good proceeds from the absolute. Therefore in the *Phaedo* and the *Theaetetus* Plato says the soul's highest good is to be like God.[78]

The *Philebus*, the final dialogue in Ficino's series, has its own "wonderful order," whose aim (*skopos*) sums up the totality of the aims of the Platonic corpus as a whole.

Turning one's attention to the works that follow the ten Platonic dialogues in the manuscript given to Cosimo, one first finds a short excerpted summary based in part on *Euthydemus* 278e–282a, which begins, "Plato in the *Euthydemus*, or *On Happiness*, says that all men do good, that is, we wish to live well."[79] This passage is itself related to the Platonic greeting found in Plato's own letters (εὖ πράττειν) that Iamblichus in the *Protrepticus* explains as the first demonstration of Pythagorean exhortations to philosophy.[80] The summary of the *Euthydemus* in the manuscript also ends with an appeal to true happiness as the beatific state of becoming godlike from *Theaetetus* 176a–c: "For thus our rational soul resembling him flees to God, which is wisdom itself, and indeed Plato thinks that this likeness consists of the highest order of beatitudes,"[81] which Iamblichus believes is the goal of the Pythagorean way of life. Once all this evidence is taken into consideration, it is no surprise to learn that the second Platonic fragment, after the *Euthydemus*, that follows the decade of Platonic dialogues in the Bodleian manuscript for Cosimo is in fact the precise passage from *Theaetetus* 176 detailing the need to flee this world and assimilate to God. By the time he gave the Bodleian manuscript to Cosimo, Ficino had already translated this famous passage from the *Theaetetus* as well as the identical passage that Iamblichus quotes verbatim in the *Protrepticus* as a Pythagorean message.[82] As I mentioned, Iamblichus on a number of occasions in the *Protrepticus* states that the proper task of philosophy is abandoning a life of financial riches in order to learn how to die in preparation for assimilation with the gods and the One-Good. This goal for the philosophical way of life adds a particular resonance to the fact that Ficino's project was intended for Cosimo perhaps, in Ficino's mind, to help the old banker turn away from his preoccupation with wealth toward philosophical contemplation as he lay dying.[83] Cosimo had supposedly asked Ficino to bring the *Philebus* and his Orphic lyre to teach him the way to happiness. He would have heard a response informed by Iamblichus. These Iamblichean tones might in effect attune Ficino's earliest translations of Plato with what one could characterize as a Pythagorianizing Platonic consolation of philosophy. They would, I think, also inflect his meaning when Ficino addresses his patron as "happy Cosimo" in his preface with a particular Neoplatonic and Pythagorean understanding of happiness as a divine way of life. After all, echoing the words of the Pythagoreanizing Iamblichus in his preface to Cosimo, Ficino claims that Plato imitated or perhaps followed the Pythagorean way of life above all others (*pre ceteris imitatus est*).[84] The order to Ficino's early Platonic corpus, therefore, has the goal of helping its readers become godlike by forming them into Platonic philosophers and perhaps even Pythagorean personae.[85]

The Character of Platonic Dialogues

In his first serious interpretation of Plato, Ficino therefore shaped the corpus into a decade while listening to Iamblichus Pythagoreanizing. It was in the immediate generations after Plotinus that Neoplatonists began writing commentaries on Plato and structuring the corpus of his works according to a philosophical curriculum. Middle Platonists, however, had already developed reading strategies for the corpus that partially influenced later Neoplatonists.[86] Ficino also worked with some of these Middle Platonic interpretive traditions. It is no coincidence that he includes his translation of Alcinous's *Didaskalikos* in the manuscript of dialogues given to Cosimo, since Alcinous was in fact one of the first philosophers to focus on the idea of the assimilation to God in Plato.[87] Alcinous quotes all the famous loci classici for this idea in Plato (*Theaetetus* 176a–c; *Republic* 613a; *Phaedo* 82a–b; *Laws* 715e–716a; *Phaedrus* 248a). Ficino may not have completely finalized his intended project of a magisterial complete edition of Plato's dialogues for Lorenzo de' Medici, organized in a particular order, along with their commentaries and perhaps even Ficino's own *Platonic Theology*. Nevertheless, it is clear from the preface by Ficino to his *Commentaria Platonis* dedicated to Lorenzo in 1491 that he did not altogether abandon the hermeneutical goals of the earlier edition that he prepared for Cosimo. In this later preface to Lorenzo, Ficino once more describes the goal of Platonism as leading toward philosophical happiness or even beatification in assimilating to God: "For religion—which is the only way to happiness (*felicitatem*)—ought to be the common truth not only for the more uncultivated men but also for the cleverer ones. Indeed, in this manner all are led to beatitude (happiness, *beatitudinem*), which is the reason we are born, and we can all work in common study to arrive at this end more easily and safely. Thus omnipotent God, at an established time, sent down from on high the divine mind of Plato to shed light on sacred religion for all peoples, with his life, ingenium, and wondrous eloquence."[88] The later preface immediately continues to speak of Cosimo's role in bringing about this Latin revival of Platonism, directly recalling Ficino's earlier preface, to Cosimo. The preface to Lorenzo ends in similar terms, once more addressing how studying Plato converts the reader to a happier and divine life.[89] The reasons Ficino translated Alcinous and included him in the manuscript he prepared for Cosimo become apparent. Since Alcinous stresses assimilation to God as the goal of Platonism, his work reinforces the goal of Ficino's own ordering of the Platonic corpus.

While Alcinous delineates the process of attaining a likeness to God according to the educational curriculum drawn from the *Republic* and according to Platonic virtue theory, he does not explicitly link this to an ordered reading of the Platonic corpus.[90] However, another Middle Platonist with a similar name, Albinus, undertook this task explicitly. In his *Prologue* to Plato, Albinus divides the dialogues according to their natural character and structures their correct reading sequence according to the philosophical goal of assimilating to the divine.[91] Chapter 6 of the *Prologue* outlines an ordered reading of the dialogues according to the classifications of peiriastic (experimental dialogues aiming to refute and purge), maieutic (dialogues that help bring ideas to light), hyphegetic (expository dialogues), logical and zetetic (dialogues of inquiry and dialectic), and endeictic and anatreptic dialogues (dialogues that aim at demonstrating and refuting sophistries). Albinus places the instructional or dogmatic dialogues (hyphegetic) that direct the reader toward the assimilation to God in the middle of the order. His ideal reader therefore begins and ends with a purgative refutation of sophistries. This would agree with his prior statement in chapter 5 regarding studying Plato in a circular fashion. He even states that where one commences to read in the corpus will depend on subjective criteria, such as natural disposition, age, and education.

Historians of philosophy are right to point out that Albinus's *Prologue* is somewhat confused, inasmuch as the order of study proposed in chapter 6 does not completely agree with the curriculum proposed in chapter 5. There the curriculum proceeds as follows: *Alcibiades* (maieutic), *Phaedo* (ethical), *Republic* (political), *Timaeus* (physical). The confusion is compounded if one compares these two orders to the classification of the specific dialogues in chapter 3 of the *Prologue*. Albinus writes that one can segment the Platonic corpus into natural divisions according to their character.[92] The text for the classification of the specific dialogues that follows is very corrupt. Previous scholars have noted the poor state of the text and compared it to a similar passage in Diogenes Laertius to make sense of it.[93] Ficino, however, did not have the benefit of these modern philological emendations. The texts that he had at his disposal are very corrupt.[94] Despite this, the division of the Platonic dialogues into character types still had an impact on Ficino's interpretation of the corpus.

In his *De vita Platonis*, which eventually became part of the prefatory matter for his translation of the corpus, Ficino employs character types to interpret Plato's dialogues: "There are three species of Platonic dialogues. For either he confutes sophists, or he exhorts youths, or again he teaches adults."[95] In the first

lines of his *epitome* to the *Meno*, whose purpose he delinates as being about virtue, Ficino proposes a more detailed account of this classification of the Platonic dialogues:

> There are four genera of argumentation that Plato employs: example, induction, *ratiocinatio*, and enthymeme. It is shown how these arise well enough in Alcinous's *Compendium*, which we have translated. There we also find three species of Platonic dialogue—and it is Plato's habit to employ arguments for each species of dialogue. For one species of dialogue inquires and refutes falsehoods, another explains and teaches the truth, another turns on both these approaches. The first species of dialogue is inquisitive or contentious, the second is expository, the third is a mixed species. Although one can call the *Meno* a mixed form of dialogue, for the most part, however, it argues and refutes, but touches on all these kinds of argumentation.[96]

Ficino read similar divisions both in Diogenes Laertius's *Life of Plato* and in the earliest recorded formulation of this classificatory system in Albinus's *Prologue*. In a manner similar to their division into two large classifications, Ficino divides the Platonic corpus into the species of inquisitive (zetetic) dialogues, which either investigate topics or confute falsehoods, and the species of expository (hyphegetic) dialogues, which teach and demonstrate the truth. Unlike Diogenes Laertius and Albinus, however, Ficino interprets this classificatory division as tripartite, allowing for a third class of dialogue that would be a mixture of the two. Again unlike Diogenes Laertius and Albinus, in his *epitome* to the *Meno* Ficino does not bother with the more particular subspecies of the classificatory schemas. Nor does the sequential order of Ficino's complete Plato translation of 1484 necessarily follow the dialogic character types recorded in Albinus and Diogenes Laertius. In the case of Albinus, Ficino perhaps would have rejected the dialogues' classification as preserved in Ficino's own manuscript, since it makes the *Apology* and the *Timaeus* equally physical and ethical, and it classifies the *Parmenides* as elenctic, that is, an argumentative or aporetic dialogue. This last point would have been enough for him to reject Albinus's (and Diogenes Laertius's) classifications, since Ficino thinks that the *Parmenides* is theological (and largely based on Pythagorean doctrines).

One must therefore look elsewhere for Ficino's tripartite classification of dialogues. The fact that the *epitome* to the *Meno* explicitly mentions Alcinous instead of Albinus deserves a pause. The names of the authors of the two texts

are similar enough. Alcinous is the author of the *Didaskalikos*, and Albinus is the author of the *Prologue*. More than a century ago, Jacob Freudenthal argued that although the manuscripts of the *Didaskalikos* preserve the name of the author as Alkinous (or Alkinoos), we ought to identify him as the Middle Platonist Albinus. The confusion of names, he believed, arose from scribal errors. Thereafter, Michelangelo Giusta and especially John Whittaker (and more recently Burkhard Reis) have argued to the contrary, splintering the previous consensus that had formed around Freudenthal's argument for a singular author, Albinus, of the *Didaskalikos* and the *Prologue*. Now it is common to speak of two Middle Platonists: Albinus, the author of the *Prologue*, and Alcinous (or simply *A*., as John Dillon identifies him), the author of the *Didaskalikos*.[97] Ficino gives us a clue to his source in the *epitome* to the *Meno* when he speaks of four kinds of Platonic argument (examples, induction, syllogisms, and enthymemes), since to do so he is drawing specifically on chapters 3–6 of Alcinous's *Didaskalikos*.[98] In the *epitome* to the *Meno* Ficino states that this is shown in Alcinous's *Compendium*, which he claims to have translated. He immediately states, however, that one can also read there about the three species of Platonic dialogue discussed above. This is a little confusing, since Alcinous's *Didaskalikos*, unlike the works of Albinus and Diogenes Laertius, is not typically recognized as a source text for this kind of division of Platonic dialogues into species or character types. Ficino, however, has in mind a very short passage in *Didaskalikos* 6.4: "Plato uses demonstrative syllogisms in his expository dialogues, syllogisms based on widely held opinion when dealing with sophists and young people, and eristic ones when dealing with those properly called eristics, such as Euthydemus, for example, or Hippias."[99] That Ficino here cites Alcinous explains all the issues I have raised: why Ficino introduces a threefold division of the dialogues (instead of twofold, like Diogenes Laertius and Albinus), why he does not go into the further specifics of their subclassificatory schemas, and why he does not adopt their particular orders for the dialogues.

Therefore, despite Ficino's strong penchant for Neoplatonism, it is clear that he did not ignore the Middle Platonist Alcinous. The *Didaskalikos* is the title employed for the much longer of the two works that has survived with two titles.[100] Ficino translated this text into Latin and printed it with Aldus Manutius in 1497 in a volume containing Iamblichus's *De mysteriis* as well as other Platonic texts.[101] This 1497 edition preserves the title *Alcinoi Platonici philosophi liber de doctrina Platonis* for the *Didaskalikos*. Although Ficino consistently employs the name Alcinous, he is not so consistent with the title. He knew both

Greek titles from his manuscripts of Alcinous and translates the work as *Compendium* in his *epitome* to the *Meno*, but as *Epitoma* in a 1476 letter to Poliziano, the so-called first catalogue of Ficino's works.[102] In his preface to his translations of Platonic dialogues to Cosimo, Ficino simply mentions it as *liber* and lists it as "opuscula Speusippi et Alcinoi platonici duo."[103] Likewise, in his preface to "Alcinoi et Speussippi opuscula," addressed to Cavalcanti, Ficino simply refers to Alcinous's work as a *liber*.[104]

Even though Ficino employs Alcinous's classification, he does not ignore the other Middle Platonic source in question: Albinus. Ficino's relationship to Albinus is still largely in a state of confusion.[105] There is evidence, however, that Ficino took an interest in Albinus's *Prologue*, since he abridged and copied a version of the Greek text in his own hand in the few pages that now bind his most important Greek manuscript of Plotinus's *Enneads*.[106] Interestingly, Ficino entitles the work in this manuscript *Alcini Platonici introductio in dialogos Platonis*.[107] In studying Plotinus's manuscripts Paul Henry first took note of this text, ignoring that it was in Ficino's hand and transcribing the author's name as a certain "Aluini." While one can understand how Henry could have read the name in the manuscript as "Aluini," in reality it is more probable that Ficino's hurried hand should be read as "Alcini." In fact, all of Ficino's Greek manuscripts clearly give the name Albinus as the author of the *Prologue*, not Alcinous.[108] This evidence means that Ficino conceived of the relationship of Albinus to Alcinous in an inverted but analogous way to Freudenthal: that is, while Freudenthal proposed to absorb Alcinous and Albinus into a single author, Albinus, Ficino does the reverse, attributing both works to Alcinous.[109]

Therefore, since Ficino did in fact think that the authors of the *Prologue* and the *Didaskalikos* were one and the same Alcinous, in his mind at least the author of the *Prologue* did have some influence on his thinking. Ficino's Alcinous would have thus written in the *Didaskalikos* a summary of Platonic dogmas and a brief outline of the classification of the corpus into three species of dialogues, which he explained in greater detail in the *Prologue*. In addition, as Ficino would note, both works propose the singular goal for Platonism as being assimilation to God, which, as seen above, Ficino also reads in Iamblichus's *Protrepticus*.[110] Whereas modern scholars now tend to separate Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic interpretations of the Platonic corpus, Ficino combines the two approaches under the larger heading of this goal.

As a case in point, in his preface to his Plato commentaries for Lorenzo de' Medici, Ficino, like other humanists of his generation, appeals to the oracular

nature of Plato's writing, explaining the positive nature of his style. Unlike these other humanists, Ficino explicitly interprets Plato's writings in this manner with the help of numerous ancient commentary traditions: "For our Plato before pouring out divine oracles, lest what is sacred becomes shared with the profane, leads the rational soul of his listeners through a triadic path to the summit: purgation, resolution, and conversion. On account of this one can read much in Plato that pertains to purging the rational soul of errors, much in turn pertaining to separating the intellect from the senses, and most on conversion first to itself, then to God, the author of all things; once converted solemnly to him, as though he were the sun, then they are happily illuminated with the desired rays of truth."[111] This may at first seem a somewhat simple reiteration of the previous tripartite division of dialogues from Alcinous, but Ficino combines his Middle Platonic source with Neoplatonic triads. Moreover, if one compares this Middle Platonic division to Ficino's organization of the early corpus of dialogues prepared for Cosimo, once more one sees something akin to a tripartite Neoplatonic order of virtues: a cathartic purging of sophistic influences, which leads to a protreptic encouragement to pursue philosophy, which in turn delves into theoretical philosophy. If one were to push the Neoplatonic reading even further one could coordinate these three species of dialogue with the three Neoplatonic metaphysical triadic principles of conversion (ἐπιστροφή) toward the One or Good, emanating (πρόοδος) from it in descent or proceeding forward to it in ascent, and remaining in its presence in contemplation or even uniting with it (μονή). This might seem a strong interpretation of Ficino's words, but given that he ordered his first Platonic corpus for Cosimo on these Neoplatonic terms (and given Ficino's very early enthusiasm and remarkable mastery of Neoplatonic texts) it might not be too far afield. Ficino's two prefaces, to Cosimo and to Lorenzo, therefore show a tripartite Neoplatonic order similar to that in the Platonic corpus.

Ficino applies this tripartite classification in various commentaries to the Platonic dialogues, and occasionally in other writings. We have already seen the passage discussing the *Meno* where he does so. To take another example, Ficino introduces the *Lysis* by saying:

> When Socrates disputes with sophists and their disciples, he refutes their false opinions, showing rather than teaching truths. For once falsehoods have been refuted sharp ingenia then hunt after the truth, needing only few tracks. This is clearly the case in the *Euthydemus*, *Protagoras*, *Meno*, *Hippias*, *Euthyphro*, and *Lysis*. But

> when Socrates is in dialogue with disciples and students, he demonstrates and teaches what is understood from many dialogues. Therefore, since the disputation about friendship in the *Lysis* is with the disciples of sophists, Socrates busies himself with confuting falsehoods rather than demonstrating truths. But we are able to conjecture Plato's thinking on friendship and love from this book, though we are able to comprehend it from his books on *Laws* and from many others.[112]

As he did for the *Meno*, Ficino follows the Thrasyllan subtitles to define the purpose (*skopos*) of each dialogue, and he also claims that Plato speaks more explicitly in the *Laws* about what can be inferred from other dialogues. Turning to his *epitome* for the *Hippias* one sees that Ficino is consistent with this interpretation. There, he confirms the same reading as his *epitome* to *Lysis*, classifying the dialogue as one in which Socrates refutes sophists' opinions on beauty.[113] Ficino also notes the same species of indirect or negative form of reasoning in the *epitome* to *Euthyphro*, where—in addition to stating that he accepts the dialogue as genuine despite the fact that some Platonists reject it (along with the *Euthydemus* and the *Hippias*)—he writes that in confuting the opinions of the sophists about holiness Socrates leaves traces for us to follow to reach the true holiness: conversion toward and assimilation to God.[114] Likewise, in the *epitome* to the *Euthydemus* he repeats the distinctions that Socrates exhorts the young, refutes sophists, and instructs legitimate men. According to this division he classifies the *Euthydemus* as a dialogue that refutes sophistries in order to convert minds toward contemplation.[115]

Ficino's *epitome* to *Protagoras* is another witness to his consistent reading of the corpus with these categories in mind. Once more he confirms his classification of Platonic dialogues that refute sophists from the *epitome* to the *Lysis*. He writes that Plato confutes the sophists in this dialogue through the persona of Socrates (*sub Socratis sui persona*) and offers the following classification of the dialogues: "Therefore, in part with irony, in part with laughter, in part with play and game, and more often honorable argumentation Socrates wishes to strip the sophists of their undeserved authority. He accomplishes this most sharply in the *Sophist*; does the same in the most elegant way in the *Gorgias*; with exceeding urbanity in the *Hippias*; ingenously and cleverly in the *Euthydemus*, skillfully in the *Protagoras*, as he does similarly so often."[116] Ficino therefore adds two further works to his list in the *epitome* to the *Lysis*

of dialogues classified as the kind that refutes sophists: the *Sophist* and the *Gorgias*.

Ficino faithfully applies this heuristic schema in these two works as well. In the *Sophist* Plato employs a method of division to analyze various definitions of "sophist" and to refute the true nature of sophistry, nonbeing. In his argumentum to the *Sophist*, Ficino introduces the dialogue in what should now be predictable terms: "While Plato treats in the *Sophist* of being, the concern of the philosopher, at the same time he treats of not-being, the lower concern of the sophist. In Pythagoras and Plato God alone is *sophos*—that is, wise—but the philosopher is God's true imitator, while the sophist is the false and ambitious emulator of the philosopher."[117] For Ficino, Plato in the *Sophist* seeks to turn the reader away from imitating sophists, that is, dissimulators of philosophers, in order to convert the reader toward a life of philosophy, that is, a life that seeks to become godlike.

One could adduce further examples to show how Ficino is consistent with this classification in the commentaries to other dialogues. In the *epitome* to the *Gorgias*, Ficino writes that Socrates seeks to refute the orators Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles before explaining positively the doctrines of the immortality of the soul (and its rewards and punishments) using the two methods of story and example of the Pythagoreans Philolaus and Empedocles.[118] To cite a few final brief examples of Ficino's classification of species of dialogues, in the *Amatores* Socrates is said to refute the opinions of Solon and Hippias on justice, about which Ficino also says Socrates expounds positively in the *Republic*. In the *Alcibiades* I and II, Ficino relates that Plato teaches about man, his duty, and prayer. And in the *Hipparchus*, he conveys that Socrates refutes once again the teachings of a sophist and indirectly teaches by way of example, induction, and elenctic reasoning.[119]

Thus, although Ficino never achieved his goal of publishing a complete Platonic corpus arranged in a particular philosophical order as he envisioned it in his grand project for a Laurentian edition, he consistently classifies the dialogues according to a tripartite schema of dialogic characters. If a systematic order to the complete corpus is lacking in Ficino's editions of Plato that survive, a heuristic classification is still clearly visible. Ficino's hermeneutics grafts the Neoplatonic tripartite order of conversion, procession, and remaining onto the Middle Platonic classification of refutation, exhortation, and instruction.[120] Similarly, it is important to see how Ficino attaches this tripartite structure onto another interpretative tradition that has its origins in Middle Platonism: prosopopoeia, or spokesperson theory.

Prosopopoeia and the Platonic Corpus

Ficino would have found a prosopopoeic approach to the dialogues and a classification of the Platonic corpus into two—not quite Ficino's three—species of dialogue (elenctic and dogmatic) in Quintilian, whom he quotes on a few occasions to evaluate the style of Plato's prose.[121] Quintilian introduces this classification while discussing the *Gorgias*: "All these statements occur in the *Gorgias* and are uttered by Socrates who appears to be the mouthpiece (*persona*) of the views held by Plato. But some of his dialogues were composed merely to refute his opponents and are styled *refutative* (ἐλεγκτικούς), while others are for the purpose of teaching and are called *doctrinal* (δογματικοί)."[122] This is fairly close to Ficino's division of the Platonic corpus in his *De vita Platonis*, insofar as elenctic dialogues are aporetic dialogues that refute sophists, and dogmatic dialogues can be understood as aiming primarily at instructing adults. Quintilian does not, however, include the protreptic dialogue aiming at encouraging or exhorting youths to philosophy in his classification. Moreover, although he employs prosopopoeia for explaining how Plato voices his opinion through Socrates' persona in the *Gorgias*, he mentions neither Pythagorean personae nor Plato himself, as Ficino does. Thus Ficino does not simply claim like Quintilian that Socrates is Plato's spokesperson in the *Gorgias* but contends that Socrates first serves as Plato's persona to refute the sophists Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles, and then changes stylistic register to recount myths at the end of the dialogue by adopting a Pythagorean voice.

It is worth noting that Ficino would have also encountered a spokesperson theory in Albinus's *Prologue*, where the author defines a dialogue as follows: "A [dialogue] is nothing other than a discourse composed out of questions and answers about political and philosophical matters, along with character drawings (ἠθοποιίας) befitting the dialogue's personae (προσώπων), furnishing them with corresponding stylistic registers (λέξιν)."[123] The *Prologue* further explains this reading strategy with an analogy: just as tragedy and poetry have myth as their subject matter, so analogously dialogue is concerned with philosophical matters. It continues to explain the dialogic personae (*prosopa*) according to the concepts of decorum and *ethopoiia*, that is, character drawings. The rhetorical figure of ethopoiia is part of the same discursive technique as prosopopoeia, and both were at times rendered by the Latin expression *sermocinatio*. The rhetorical figures express two sides of the same coin: just as one needs to fabricate a particular person (*prosopon*) suitable to communicate a specific ethos, so one also needs to produce a particular ethos suitable to a specific person.[124]

The prosopopoeic approach to Plato's corpus is in fact older than Quintilian and Albinus. The rationale of employing this method originates in Plato's own dialogues, specificaly in his explicit explanation of authors' imitative capacity for prosopopoeia. The most famous instance of this theory is in Socrates' critique of Homer in *Republic* 3 for being able to imitate the speech and manner (ἢ κατὰ φωνὴν ἢ κατὰ σχῆμα) of various persons and gods. There is, of course, deep irony at play here, since Plato provides one of the greatest examples of prosopopoeia, demonstrating his own ability to imitate various persons, including fairly complicated stylistic registers, as in Phaedrus's delivery of Lysias's speech or Aristophanes and Agathon's respective speeches in the *Symposium*—to say nothing of the voice he gives to Socrates, his greatest achievement in this regard.

The first documented interpreter of Plato to employ a prosopopoeic interpretation of Plato is the first-century BCE Pythagoreanizing Middle Platonist, Eudorus of Alexandria. His hermeneutical perspective reverberated exceptionally well with Iamblichus and Ficino. The fragments of his writings that contain his interpretation of Plato are preserved by Stobaeus:

> Socrates and Plato agree in this respect with Pythagoras: the goal of man is to become like God. Plato explains this more clearly, adding "as much as possible," and it is only possible in thinking, and by living according to a virtuous life. For in God is the maker and ruler of the cosmos, but in the wise man there is the establishment of a way of life and oversight of life. Homer referred to this when he said "walk in the footsteps of God." Pythagoras for his part said this as "follow God." Clearly this God is not visible and going in front of us, but is a noetic God harmonizing the good order of the cosmos. Plato says this according to the tripartite division of philosophy: in the *Timaeus* according to physics (and one should add in a Pythagorean manner), explaining the meaning of Pythagoras's precious teachings without envy; in the *Republic* according to ethics; in the *Theaetetus* according to logic; in the fourth book of the *Laws* also Plato discusses clearly and equally abundantly the goal of following after God. For Plato has many voices (πολύφωνον) but not many opinions (οὐ πολύδοξον). For he speaks in many ways about this goal. He has a great variety in speaking and magniloquence of discourse, but it comes together in the harmony of this dogma: which is to live according to virtue.[125]

Although Ficino does not name Eudorus in any of his writings, he shares a couple of characteristics with him: first, they understand the goal of Platonism as assimilating to God, and second, they think that the Platonic corpus holds a unitary message despite its dialogic nature, that is, Plato has many voices, not many opinions.

Concerning the first point, Eudorus might skip over some testimonies where Plato argues that philosophy should lead to the assimilation to the divine—the *Phaedrus*, for instance (although he alludes to *Phdr.* 266b–c, where Socrates claims to walk in the footsteps of the dialectician as though he were a god)—but he cites the four chief loci classici in the Platonic corpus for this idea. He also interprets this Platonic goal according to a traditional tripartite division of philosophy: one can understand becoming like God from a physical and Pythagorean perspective by reading *Timaeus* 90a–d, from an ethical perspective *Republic* 608c–611e, and from a logical perspective the famous passage from *Theaetetus* 176a–c. He then cites *Laws* 716a–c as an exemplary passage that also demonstrates the assimilation to God. In his interpretation of this passage from the *Laws*, Ficino diverges from Eudorus insofar as his Christian reading of this passage is at odds with the Middle Platonist's opinion that the God the philosopher follows is "not a visible God that walks in front of us."[126]

It is Iamblichus's opinion that Plato's protreptic encouragement to assimilate to God as much as possible has its origins in a Pythagorean exhortation. Indeed, Iamblichus argues that Plato cites specific Pythagorean sayings in his dialogues to make the case. Eudorus presumably would have agreed, even if he adds Homer to the group. Ficino broadly follows a Pythagoreanizing-Platonic approach in organizing the first dialogues he translated for Cosimo. Even earlier, however, in his *De quatuor sectis philosophorum* of 1457, before he had mastered Greek, Ficino had already established from Latin sources the goal of Platonism as being assimilation to God, writing: "The highest good is to become like God."[127] Ficino remained consistent in this approach throughout his life. In his commentary to *Laws* 716a–c he writes:

> After this Plato exhorts the people so that each one of them seeks earnestly to be counted among those who follow after God, striving to please God in all things, and so that they pursue this goal, rendering themselves similar to God, similar, I say, through the purity of their temperance, as though it were an exact rule (or ruler) with which they can measure all things pertaining to themselves. Since measure, as Pythagoras says, is thought to be the greatest of all things, it makes

> the rational soul similar to God. Indeed, since God is the measure of all things, especially for us, clearly we ought either to follow or to flee each thing to the degree that it has been determined to be proportionate or disproportionate to the divine intellect and will. For this reason Plato says the following in his *Letters*: "Indeed law is God for the wise, while wantonness is God for the foolish."[128]

Even in the *Laws* and the *Epistles*, where he argues that Plato is speaking in his own voice, Ficino thinks that Plato's opinion that measure makes men similar to God is a Pythagorean saying. This Pythagorean logic is evident in Ficino's interpretation of the other significant passages listed above. Ficino believes that it is with a Pythagorean persona that Plato formulates the opinion in *Timaeus* 90a–d that the soul contemplating the heavens can assimilate to its divine and measured movements. Similarly, Ficino interprets the myth of the closing book of the *Republic* with the help of his interpretation of 611e that "the just flee this world to become like God, while the unjust become unlike him."[129] It only makes sense to Ficino that the belief that God is the measure of all things is related to perhaps the most well known instance of this leitmotif in the Platonic corpus: the critique in the *Theaetetus* of Protagoras's opinion that man is the measure of all things. Although it is far from being the sole way in which Ficino reads Plato, it is clear that understanding various modes of assimilating to the divine often guided his interpretation.

Ficino therefore largely agrees with these Pythagoreanizing and Middle Platonic formulations of the goal of Platonism, but he also shares the second point of Eudorus's hermeneutics in that he interprets Plato's corpus as polyphonic. I do not wish to argue that Ficino was directly inspired by Eudorus. Rather, I simply want to note that since Eudorus is perhaps the first Middle Platonist who commented on Plato, he stands at the forefront of a long tradition of dividing the Platonic corpus into Socratic, Pythagorean, and Platonic voices. Ficino revives this tradition in the fifteenth century.

The third-century biographer and doxographer Diogenes Laertius records in his *Life of Plato* that the ancients were aware of these exegetical difficulties: "But since there is much debate, with some asserting that Plato dogmatized and others asserting that he did not, we now ought to make a distinction about this matter."[130] Diogenes Laertius distinguishes between an aporetic and dogmatic interpretation of Plato. His solution to the polemical interpretive discord is to allow for both by way of prosopopoeia, that is, by introducing dramatic characters or masks (πρόσωπα). Only through the interlocutors of Socrates, Timaeus,

the Athenian Stranger, and the Eleatic Stranger does Plato give positive doctrines. He clarifies: "These Strangers are not, as some assumed, Plato and Parmenides but are anonymous figures (πλάσματά ἐστιν ἀνώνυμα)."[131] Likewise, through other characters, Plato gives negative doctrines and falsehoods. The reader is left to suppose that all other arguments voiced by unnamed characters engage with probability, possibility, and verisimilitude. Socrates, as noted above, is an obvious choice as Plato's mouthpiece. It is also not surprising to find Timaeus included in Diogenes Laertius's list, since he is not so much an interlocutor in the dialogue that bears his name as a lecturer who delivers a long, uninterrupted monologue while his listeners sit in Pythagorean silence. Timaeus's speech could, in fact, be considered a momentary suspension of the dialogue form, which nonetheless fits within the dialogic nature of the complete corpus of dialogues. It is also very likely that Diogenes Laertius includes Timaeus and the Eleatic Stranger in his list of Plato's dramatic spokespersons because they represent two of the major philosophies studied by Plato: Timaeus stands in for the Pythagoreans, and the Eleatic Stranger, unsurprisingly, for the Eleatic school.[132]

Quintilian once more confirms the use among both Greeks and Romans of prosopopoeia to understand the dialogue form. In explicating the concept, he associates the figure of thought with *inventio*, explains its relationship to dialogue, and relates that some translate it by the Latin *sermocinatio*.[133] Ficino certainly read Diogenes Laertius both in Greek and in the Latin translation by Ambrogio Traversari, yet in his own *De vita Platonis* he dissents from Diogenes' judgment in identifying the anonymous Athenian Stranger as Plato. Following a categorization of Plato's dialogues as either elenctic (an aporetic dialogue that refutes sophists and/or encourages youths) or dogmatic (a dialogue that primarily instructs adults), Ficino writes: "What Plato said in his own voice in the *Letters*, *Laws*, and *Epinomis* he desires to be held as absolutely certain; but what he argues in the other books in the mouth (*os*) of Socrates, Timaeus, Parmenides, and Zeno he wants to be held as having the appearance of the truth (*verisimilia*)."[134] He uses the Latin *os* (mouth/face/speech) in a manner more or less equivalent to the Greek πρόσωπον (mask/face), recalling the old (and likely erroneous) Latin auditory etymology for *persona* as something through which a voice resounds (*personare*).[135] Ficino, like Diogenes Laertius, also distinguishes the Socratic from the Timaean and Eleatic schools of philosophy (the latter two being, for him, essentially Pythagorean). All are cast aside as presenting arguments based on verisimilitude and not on truth itself.

In this regard, Ficino is responding to Augustine, who, in his *Contra Academicos*, argues against the skepticism of the New Academy, via Cicero's *Academica*, and draws a sharp division between truth and verisimilitude: between, on the one hand, a hidden esoteric doctrinal and dogmatic Plato concerned with truth and, on the other, a false exoteric skeptical and aporetic Platonism concerned with verisimilitude and probability. Although his interpretation of Plato is often esoteric, Ficino is going beyond Augustinian demarcations by looking for explicit doctrines and dogmas. Eugène Napoleon Tigerstedt argued that the esoteric tradition for interpreting Plato originated with Augustine. The bishop of Hippo, however, did not have such an influence in the Byzantine East as he did in the Latin West, and clearly Bessarion's interpretation of Plato, described earlier in this chapter, also presents esoteric tendencies. That Bessarion instead draws on Pythagorean traditions for esoteric interpretations of Plato demonstrates an alternative source to Augustine's in quattrocento Italy. In fact, the esoteric interpretation of Plato seems to predate Augustine in Neopythagorean pseudepigrapha.[136]

In his youthful *De ordine*, Augustine had praised Pythagoras and Pythagoreans, but he later retracted this position lest he introduce his Christian readers to their errors. In his sermon *Contra Paganos*, Augustine groups them into a category similar to the Platonists, prideful philosophers who rely solely on their intellect instead of God's word to reach the divine.[137] In the later Augustine's mind, Plato's adoption of Socrates and Pythagorean arguments confuse his readers, obfuscate the way to God, and ultimately blind them with pride. Even though he sometimes puts aside his Pythagoreanizing tendencies for other interpretive approaches, Ficino never explicitly retracts them.

In studying Plato, Ficino mined various traditions of Platonism to find guides for reading the dialogues. He might have been inspired by the older attempts recorded in Albinus, Alcinous, and Diogenes Laertius to arrange the Platonic corpus but he follows neither their exact order nor their particular classification of dialogues (either in the ordering of the early manuscript that he prepared for Cosimo or in his later arrangement of the complete corpus). For the reasons outlined above—the protreptic nature of Ficino's preface to Cosimo and its ordering sequence, his encouragement to turn away from wealth, his placement of the Good as the highest point in the order, the association of the assimilation to God with bliss, the additions of the fragments of the *Euthydemus* and the *Theaetetus*, and the inclusion of Pythagorean materials in the Bodleian manuscript—all point to the influence of Iamblichus's *Protrepticus* on

Ficino's early work on the corpus. Similarly, Ficino might at times employ the paratexts in his primary Greek manuscript as guides to his interpretation of Plato—Ficino even translates a few of the works that accompany the dialogues, Alcinous's *Didaskalikos*, Theon of Smyrna's *Mathematica*, Pythagoras's *Aurea verba*—but he does not follow the manuscript's arrangement of the dialogues into a Thrasyllan order.[138]

Ficino, in other words, appropriated a variety of ancient traditions for interpreting Plato rather than simply adopting a single particular guide. Despite never achieving his goal of producing a grand edition of Plato's works organized according to his specific hermeneutical designs, Ficino in his prosopopoeic approach cuts across his reading of the entire corpus. There are certainly precedents for this method in antiquity, but there are no identifiable interpreters among the ancients who could serve as precedents for Ficino's precise identification of the *Laws*, *Epinomis*, and the *Letters* as a group of works in which Plato speaks in his own persona, or for Ficino's habit of associating this kind of reading with the tripartite categorization of species of dialogic characters or with the Neoplatonic triad of conversion, procession, and remaining. It also becomes apparent that this hermeneutical strategy stood behind many of Ficino's Platonic letters studied in the previous chapter. These letters at times refute the sophistries of his day (which Ficino often identifies as impiety, cynicism, Epicureanism, and Cyrenaic philosophy, as well as Averroism and excessive Alexandrist interpretations of Aristotle), they frequently exhort the youth to turn to Platonic philosophy, and finally they aim at unifying his epistolary interlocutors qua Platonic persons with the divine.

In the next three chapters I examine how Ficino applies these hermeneutics to the Platonic corpus to identify passages where Plato speaks through Socrates, Pythagoreans, and his own persona.

CHAPTER 3

Socrates

> Have you not noticed, most honorable men, in those previous discourses that when Plato forms the image of Love himself, he paints Socrates' complete portrait and describes the figure of that god from the *persona* of Socrates (*ex Socratis persona*), as though true Love and Socrates were the same, and accordingly Socrates is above all the true and legitimate lover? You will see Socrates formed (*figuratum*) in him. Place the *persona* of Socrates before your eyes (*Socrates personam ante oculos ponite*).
>
> —Ficino, *De amore*

Figures of Socrates

In the preceding chapter I argued that the consolations of philosophy Ficino presented to Cosimo on his deathbed were exhortations to follow and imitate a Platonic or even a Platonic-cum-Pythagorean life. Does this mean that Ficino's Platonism is simply an idiosyncratic Pythagoreanism that leaves no room for Socrates? If so, Ficino's Neoplatonism would fall squarely within Walter Bröcker's well-known characterization of Plotinus and subsequent Neoplatonists as Platonism without Socrates.[1] Plotinus, the argument goes, neglects the dialogic and Socratic elements of Platonism, just as Iamblichus's curriculum of study for the Platonic corpus supposedly plays down the dialogues that modern developmentalists usually refer to as early and/or Socratic dialogues. Hence, there seems to be a close analogy between how some Renaissance scholars have ignored Ficino's interest in the dialogue form and how some historians of ancient philosophy have argued that the Neoplatonists disregard Socrates. Yet a few recent

and valuable studies have begun to counter the argument that the Neoplatonists neglected the Socratic element of Plato's dialogues.[2] Similarly, Ficino's understanding of the dialogic elements of Plato fits within his largely Neoplatonic hermeneutics, but this does not mean that he neglects Socrates.

Ficino forms his image of Socrates from a variety of sources that go beyond Plato's dialogues, including but not limited to Xenophon, Lucian, Cicero, Apuleius, Diogenes Laertius, Augustine, and, most important, the Neoplatonists. Those who think that his use of such a large number of later sources contaminates Platonism with later traditions will undoubtedly think that his presentation of Socrates is anachronistic, a red herring, and the stuff of hagiography and legend rather than history. This critique of Ficino's Socrates is perfectly valid if one wishes to search for a historically authentic Socrates. Such a perspective, however, misses the mark in studying the traditions, receptions, and appropriations of Platonisms in the Renaissance.

In the preceding chapter I explained Ficino's hermeneutical tendency to classify Plato's corpus into three types of dialogue (dialogues that refute, exhort, and instruct) and to analyze the corpus into Plato's three primary prosopopoeic voices (Socrates, Pythagoras, and Plato himself, as well as various other interlocutors, sophists, youths, friends, and the rest). In both interpretive approaches Ficino's sensitivity to what one could consider the Socratic and dialogic elements becomes apparent. Socrates' aporias are his essential methods for instituting an inquisitive nature in youths. His irony and dissimulations are indispensible to refute sophistries. His playful arguments and friendly demeanor exhort his companions and interlocutors. In his taking note of these argumentative modes it is clear that Ficino follows not only in Pythagoras's lofty footsteps but also in Socrates' barefoot tracks. Yet there is also an order and hierarchy in the first interpretation of the corpus that Ficino prepared for Cosimo. Refutation prepares for exhortation, and in turn for instruction. Ficino presents each stage according to a Neoplatonic triad of conversion, procession, and remaining—all of which strives toward assimilation to God. Ficino does not, however, adopt Neoplatonic metaphysics at the expense of Socrates.

Despite his never writing a word for posterity, the influence of Socrates has extended far beyond his Athenian conversational partners. He has had an almost incalculable impact on virtually every ancient school of philosophy, and on a great deal of modern thinkers. Just as myriad philosophers have seen themselves in the image of Socrates, they in turn have shaped Socrates into their own image.[3] It would be pointless to rehash the almost countless appropriations of Socrates throughout history, but clearly Ficino holds an important place in

these traditions. Beginning with Coluccio Salutati, Italian humanists turned Socrates into a model citizen and wise pagan philosopher. In the next generation, Leonardo Bruni and Gianozzo Manetti (1396–1459) retained Salutati's image of Socrates but tried to make him tolerable to Christianity.[4]

In the person of Socrates, Ficino sees Plato speaking through a particular kind of rhetorical mask suitable to the requirements of particular audiences and arguments. This understanding of Socrates' dialogic role agrees nicely with his ironic dissimulations and his famous dictum that all he knows is to know nothing. But such a reading of Socrates does not mean that the Socratic mask remains simply an exterior façade for Ficino. Ficino's Socrates is more than a simple pedagogical puppet for teaching youths and an argumentative tool for refuting sophists. As Hankins and Allen have argued, Ficino conceives of him as something like a holy man on a divine mission.[5] How, then, do these two character traits—the ironic persona of Socrates and his status as a holy man—sit together in the same person? It is with Ficino's interpretation of Socrates in his *Symposium* commentary, the *De amore*, that one ought to begin to answer this question.

Salutati, Bruni, and Manetti explained Socrates ethically, as a philosopher who was also an exemplary citizen. Considering Socrates as a virtuous man is nothing new. Indeed, there is an old tradition that philosophical ethics has its origins in Socratic philosophy. Augustine, for instance, writes in *De civitate Dei* that Socrates is the first philosopher to turn his attention to ethics.[6] Yet when considering the religious dimensions of Socrates' ethics, as Ficino will do centuries later, Augustine thinks that the teachings of Socrates on the highest good were so confused or deliberately concealed that he caused great disagreement among his disciples. For the Christian reader, Augustine reasons, the opinions of Plato's Socrates are at best unreliable, even when they seem to agree with Christianity, and at worst are opposed to Christianity. In either case, since only the Christian virtues are true, his teachings can in no way assure salvation.[7] Ficino too turns to ethics to make sense of Plato's Socrates, but his positive assessment of Socratic ethics goes beyond Salutati's and Bruni's ideas of virtious citizenship, and far beyond Augustine's final theological judgment.

Socrates in the *De amore*: Personae and Order

At the end of the *Symposium* Alcibiades famously gives a lifelike representation of Socratic irony when he compares Socrates to Silenus, whose outer hybrid grotesque face or mask (πρόσωπον) hides both an inner divinity and complex

philosophical problems.[8] Alcibiades' intoxicated description of Socrates in the *Symposium* is perhaps the most revealing ancient portrait of the philosopher. Ficino's vivid retelling of the passage in his own *De amore* creates a Renaissance counterpart to the ancient image. Completed by 1469, the commentary by Ficino on Plato's *Symposium*, the *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis*, also known simply as the *De amore*, is his best-known commentary on Plato, and one of his most famous works in general.[9] The *De amore* circulated widely and independently from his other Platonic commentaries. Ficino prepared his own vernacular Tuscan translation of the work, and it was also translated into French in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.[10] It is well known that the *De amore* influenced Ficino's contemporaries' opinions about beauty, spurred other Renaissance authors to compose their own dialogues on love, and inspired the musings of Renaissance poets and artists. In fact, so strong is Ficino's influence in these matters that it inspired almost countless works of scholarship during the past century (and still today) on Renaissance literature and art. In particular, much has been written on the importance of Ficino's theory of the two loves in the *De amore*—so much, indeed, that it might at times distract us from some of the other features of the work.

Of particular interest is Ficino's depiction of Socrates in the commentary. Plato's artistic genius in the *Symposium* couples Alcibiades' praise and portrait of Socrates with the previous interlocutor's encomia and depictions of the god Eros. Ficino's own *De amore* imitates Plato's diptych of Socrates and Eros just as it emulates the dialogic form of Plato's *Symposium*. *De amore* stands apart from Ficino's other Platonic commentaries, epitomes, and argumenta insofar as he writes it with a dialogic form. Yet the *De amore* is not structured like many of Plato's dialogues where Socrates questions and converses with interlocutors; instead, it shares the peculiar dialogic structure of the *Symposium*: a series of speeches delivered by separate speakers.

Ficino sets the stage for his *De amore* with a dramatic setting, recounting that he and his Platonic dining companions—nine friends, to match the number of muses—held a symposium at Lorenzo de' Medici's Careggi villa to celebrate Plato, who (tradition holds) was born on 7 November and died eighty-one years later to the day. Ficino was reviving a tradition that had lain dormant for more than twelve hundred years since the days of Plotinus and Porphyry, in whose *Life of Plotinus* he read about the custom of commemorating Plato with a banquet. Scholars have debated the historical factualness of the event depicted in the *De amore*, questioning particularly whether there were in fact two symposia (one in the countryside at Lorenzo's Careggi villa and another in the city center at Francesco Bandini's house), and whether Ficino later added references

to Lorenzo's name and his Careggi villa as dedications and tributes to the new Florentine prince after the death of his father, Piero.[11]

These historical questions are not my present concern, and I bring them up to make a few concise points about the discourses in Ficino's *De amore*. It is clear that *all* the words spoken in the *De amore* are Ficino's, even if he places them in the mouths of various interlocutors. As is the case with any Platonic dialogue, and like most Renaissance humanist dialogues, the reader cannot naively assume that the text is an exact historical representation of an actual conversation or that the opinions of the interlocutors represent the exact opinions of real historical persons. All the same, this does not preclude the possible historical reality of Florentine Platonic symposia, nor that Ficino possibly drew on actual conversations for inspiration in the *De amore*. Likewise, for the dialogic fiction of the *De amore* to convince its audience it needs to function according to a twin principle of decorum whereby its interlocutors and speeches need to be written in a manner that suits and corresponds, on the one hand, to Ficino's actual friends and, on the other, to Plato's speakers. Ficino distributes the dialogic roles in the *Symposium* to seven of his companions apparently by drawing lots. After dinner, under the watchful eye of the architrichlinus Francesco Bandini, Bernardo Nuzzi first read the *Symposium*, presumably in Ficino's translation. Nuzzi would thus have spoken Ficino's own words, casting Ficino as Plato's Latin spokesperson. One by one each speaker in the *De amore* then interpreted each dialogue in the *Symposium* in the following order: Giovanni Cavalcanti, Ficino's unique friend, is selected for Phaedrus; Antonio Agli, the bishop of Fiesole, for Pausanias; Diotifeci Ficino, that is, Marsilio's own father, who was also a medical doctor, for the doctor Eryximachus; the poet Cristoforo Landino appropriately for the poet Aristophanes; Carlo Marsuppini, the son of a Florentine professor and chancellor of the same name, for Agathon; Tommaso Benci, the nephew of Amerigo Benci who gave Ficino one of his Plato manuscripts, for Socrates; and Christopher Marsuppini, the younger brother of Carlo, for Alcibiades. Ficino informs the reader that Antonio and Diotifeci needed to leave, and so their roles were also assigned to Giovanni Cavalcanti.[12] The above order is otherwise respected in the sequence of discourses.

The first point that one should observe is that the various speeches in the *De amore* are forms of rhetorical enargeia. In other words, each speech presents a persona on display for the audience. In the words of the classical rhetoricians whom Ficino studies, in the *De amore* each speaker places an individual persona before the eyes of the interlocutors (*ponere ante oculos*).[13] As early as Dionysius of Halicarnassus's account of Lysias's merits as an orator, rhetorical

enargeia has always been associated with being able to present someone's persona (or prosopon) face to face with the audience.[14] Ancient rhetorical theory defines enargeia as descriptions that appeal to the vividness of one's senses, especially sight and fantasy. Among Latin rhetoricians enargeia is characterized as *demonstratio*, *evidentia*, *illustratio*, *repraesentatio*, and perhaps most important for Ficino's understanding of Plato's rhetorical abilities in composing dialogues, as placing someone before one's eyes: *sub oculos subiectio*, as Quintilian says, or *ante oculos*, according to Cicero—both of which may correspond to the Greek equivalent, ὑπ' ὄψιν.[15]

Discussions in rhetorical theory also ask whether the presentation of this discursive public oratorical persona communicates an inner character or ethos. This is as true in antiquity as in the Renaissance. For instance, Pietro Bembo and Gianfrancesco Pico in discussing enargeia debate the merits of what is lively (*vividus*) in rhetoric and whether one can place a lively or even living figure of Cicero before our eyes (*imaginem eius ipsius sub oculos posuerint*) by imitating him.[16] Gianfrancesco Pico, to jog our memories, argues that such a composition would not imitate the person of Cicero at all. It might replicate a Cicero out of paint, marble, or bronze but not out of flesh. These Ciceronian features (*lineamenta*) might even communicate something indistinguishable from the outward body of his persona, but they would not present his soul or spirit (*animus*; *spiritus*) before the audience's eyes.[17]

The fabrication of an oratorical persona is also analogous to the fabrication of persona in dialogues. Dionysius of Halicarnassus clarifies that enargeia is associated with the related figures of prosopopoeia and ethopopoeia—two figures that are associated with ancient dialogue theory. In setting a persona before one's eyes one fabricates evidence for character or ethos.[18] It is clear from Ficino's language that he couples rhetorical enargeia with his prosopopoeic understanding of Plato's dialogues. He signals to his readers in the *De amore*'s very first chapter that once the dialogic roles were cast, all of the interlocutors turned around to face (*ceteri ad hunc conversi sunt*) the first spokesman, Giovanni Cavalcanti, who claims that he is most pleased to play the part, or rather to wear the mask of Phaedrus (*ut personam Phedri Myrrinusii gererem*). Face-to-face exchanges are therefore just as integral to the *De amore* as they are in Ficino's Platonic letters. Even before the *De amore* begins, in its prefatory letter to Giovanni Cavalcanti, whom he designates once more as his unique friend and addresses with Plato's epistolary greeting εὖ πράττειν (which Iamblichus, as we saw, identified as a Pythagorean exhortation), Ficino writes that he had

neglected the god Eros for thirty-four years until he saw the celestial eyes (*oculis mihi celestibus*) of a hero or god, namely, Giovanni.

In fact, the meeting of the eyes of lover and beloved, each staring at each other's expressions, is an important optical, physionomic, and mathematical phenomenon that Ficino touches upon repeatedly in his explanation of Platonic love in the *De amore*. Ficino essentially grounds the effectiveness of enargeia in philosophical theories. Just as in his Platonic letters, Ficino works with geometric extramission and intramission theories of optics according to which the eyes emit and receive effluences of visual rays that transmit an actual presence on a linear vector.[19] In the *Symposium* Plato describes love according to philosophical mediation. Love, he tells his audience, is an intermediary, or daemon (δαιμόνιον), between mortals and the divine, conveying magic or divination (ἡ μαντικὴ). Similarly, in his *De amore* Ficino explains love according to theories of action at a distance (of both sight and sound) to justify how the beloved can charm, enchant, and fascinate (*fascinatio*) the lover.[20] For instance, Tommaso Benci, whom Ficino describes as a diligent imitator of Socrates with a cheerful face, explains that once a beloved's beautiful image is communicated through visual rays emitted and received by the eyes, this beautiful form can become engraved in the fantasy of the lover by way of the spirit.[21] Through Platonic theories of participation, Ficino explains that the particular image of beauty in the beloved leads the lover to the presence of beauty in general. To take another example, Ficino's Carlo Marsuppini, interpreting the role of Agathon, elucidates that the particular beautiful order of a person's countenance—the disposition, lines, and colors of his face—participates in the celestial order. To explain this experience of beauty in a person as also an experience and participation of heavenly beauty Ficino speaks of the descent of beauty's radiance (*fulgor*), both through light and sound, in bodies that have order, measure, and appearance. The order in a body makes the observer consider the order of the soul, which in turn leads to the beauty of the face of God. Beyond the body, the rational soul has a greater capacity to receive beauty's radiance by way of its spirit: "The rational soul, however, is for this reason principally suitable to receiving [beauty] because it is a spirit and it is almost like a mirror next to God, in which, just as we said earlier, the image of the divine face is present."[22]

For Ficino, Plato's artistic talents permit him to communicate beauty and order in his works. Plato's mastery of the dialogic form places the vividness of a persona before our eyes (that is its enargeia) as a speaking person capable of fascinating the reader. Just as the visual beauty of the beloved's living face or the

beautiful sound of his spoken voice can communicate his likeness across a distance to captivate the lover in face-to-face dialogue, so Plato's dialogic personae are equally capable of grasping the reader. None of Plato's dialogic personae seems to have enchanted his readers more than Socrates, whom Plato describes in the *Symposium* as a personification or embodiment of the god Eros himself. Yet Alcibiades' portrayal of his fascination seems to lack all outward beauty. Instead of bearing the countenance of a well-ordered and beautiful face, Socrates' face becomes the grotesque and monstrous prosopon (or mormolukeion) of the satyr chief Silenus.

Ficino paints Socrates' figure through the voice of Cristoforo Marsuppini, who turns to face Marsilio to deliver his speech in the persona of Alcibiades: "At last Cristoforo Marsuppini, most humane man, wearing the mask (*persona gesturus*) of Alcibiades, turned (*convertitur*) himself toward me with these words."[23] Cristoforo gives a brief synthesis of the discussions on love thus far and then delivers a fairly long line-by-line commentary on Alcibiades' visual depiction of Socrates. It is worth quoting the first few lines of the commentary to understand Ficino's hermeneutical strategies in interpreting the dialogic persona of Socrates in the *Symposium*:

> Have you not noticed, most honorable men, in those previous discourses that when Platon forms the image of Love himself, he paints Socrates' complete portrait and describes the figure of that god from the *persona* of Socrates (*ex Socratis persona*), as though true Love and Socrates were the same, and accordingly Socrates is above all the true and legitimate lover? You will see Socrates formed (*figuratum*) in him. Place the *persona* of Socrates before your eyes (*Socrates personam ante oculos ponite*). You will see a man "thin, parched, and squalid," namely, his melencholic nature, as it is reported, and rough, thin from starvation, and unkept from carelessness. You will also see him "naked," that is, covered with an old and simple little toga. You will see him "walking without shoes," for this is always how Phaedrus, in Plato's dialogue, describes Socrates walking.[24]

Ficino's full line-by-line commentary on Alcibiades' description is much longer than what I have just quoted, but this passage is enough to draw a few important conclusions. First, to analyze Alcibiades' portrait of Socrates Ficino does not limit himself to the *Symposium*. He draws on a variety of Platonic dialogues: the *Phaedrus*, *Phaedo*, *Apology*, *Gorgias*, *Progatoras*, and *Theages*. No other quat-

trocento humanist had studied the complete Platonic corpus in detail like Ficino, and he put his studies to good use in commenting on Plato's interlocutor. Second, following the logic of Alcibiades' encomium, Ficino explains that the previous praises and depictions of the god Eros are in reality composed *ex Socratis persona*. In fact, Cristoforo Marsuppini's personification of Alcibiades in his line-by-line commentary on Socrates' appearance is analogous in Ficino's text to Tommaso Benci's Socratic persona's line-by-line commentary on Diotima's account of the god Eros in the previous chapter.[25] Ficino's hermeneutics of the *Symposium* are thus based on Alcibiades' identification of Socrates with Eros; for Ficino, Socrates and Eros are two personae and one substance, so to speak.

This identification of Socrates with Eros further demonstrates the logic behind Ficino's epistolography. I previously compared Ficino's Platonic letters to other Renaissance Ciceronian epistolary disputations in which Italian humanists debated whether there is a correspondence between the outward display of a persona and a person's inner character. The *De amore* also goes down this path of inquiry and does so explicitly in terms of virtue ethics. Ficino examines the possibility of an analogy between external appearance and inner reality in the *De amore* in the same terms we saw in the letters. At the beginning of his speech, Ficino's Carlo Marsuppini, speaking for Agathon, addresses his discourse in terms of beatitude: "In the *Philebus*, Plato means that someone is happy (*beatum*) for whom nothing is lacking, namely, he is perfect in every part. There is, however, a certain interior perfection, and an exterior perfection. We say that interior perfection is goodness and exterior perfection is beauty. For this reason, what is thoroughly good and beautiful, namely, perfect in every part, we call most happy (most blessed; *beatissimus*). We certainly notice this distinction in all things. . . . In living beings, however, it is a healthy complexion of humors that produce pleasant facial features and aspects of colors (*iocundam lineamentorum et colorum speciem*). The virtue of the rational soul also seems to make itself most honorably decorous in speech, demeanor, and deeds."[26] One sees therefore that the interiorization of the person's beauty in the analysis Ficino offers of the *Symposium* is linked in his mind with virtue theory and the question of happiness (or beatitude). This is also no less the case when he theorizes in the *De amore* about love. Take, for example, how Ficino's Socratic interlocutor, Benci, explains how the lover is attracted to the beloved: "The figure of man, who is often the most beautiful in appearance on account of an interior goodness happily given to it by God, transfuses (*transfundit*) a ray of this brilliance through the eyes into the rational soul of those who gaze at it. The rational soul, attracted by this spark as though it were a certain kind of fishing hook,

hurries toward what attracts it. According to the opinion of Agathon and the other earlier speeches, we in no way hesitate to name this attraction (which is also love) beauty, goodness, happiness (beatitude), and God, since this attraction depends on what is beautiful, good, and happy it is reflected in them."[27]

Upon close study of the *De amore* one in fact notices that the work, just like his early ordering of the Platonic corpus for Cosimo de' Medici, aims at leading to the assimilation to God, which is once more understood as the true form of happiness, divinization, or beatification. Once more like his early organization of the corpus for Cosimo, I think that one can even outline a heuristic order in the *De amore* that leads its readers toward this goal. Ficino hints explicitly at this when he makes Landino say that the order of the banquet is itself proportional to the celestial order.[28] Since Ficino and Plato's respective banquets of lovers participate in the cosmic order according to an analogous ratio, there is a certain geometrical formalism in Ficino's structure of the *De amore*, which resembles something like the following.

In the first speech, interpreting Phaedrus's discourse, Giovanni Cavalcanti (who appropriately speaks three orations) introduces a Platonic triad of causes, the tripartite understanding of cosmos and its underlying chaos, and most important the Neoplatonic principle of conversion (in the triad of conversion, procession, and remaining) as an explanation for how love turns one to the divine. In his comments on the second discourse (Pausanias's oration) Cavalcanti, now speaking in the persona of Pausanias, continues to expound on the Neoplatonic triadic explanation of love, introducing Pythagorean sources, and most significant the Orphic hymn to Jove that Plato cites in *Laws* 716c in his own voice: "Pythagorean philosophers think that the triad is the measure of all things, on account of the reason, I think, that God governs things with the number three, and things also come to an end with this number. Hence Virgil says, 'The odd number is pleasing to God.' Truly that highest author first creates each particular thing, then secondly takes them back, and thirdly perfects them. In the first place, each particular thing emanates from that perennial font, then is born, and finally flows back into it, returning to its origins, where it is finally perfected after it has returned to its principle. Orpheus divined this when he called Jove the beginning, middle, and end of the universe; the beginning (or principle) insofar as it produces, middle insofar as it recalls to itself what proceeds out of it, and end insofar as it perfects what has returned."[29] Through Cavalcanti's line-by-line commentary of Plato's *Second Letter*, Ficio thereafter explains that Plato confirms these three ancient principles in his own persona. This second speech builds toward the theme that love can orient the

lover toward the direction by which one can become godlike: "It also often happens that the lover desires to transfer himself into the *persona* of the beloved, and this is not without reason, for instead of a man he desires and attempts to become God. And who would not exchange man for God?"[30]

The final two chapters of this speech are in fact exhortations to the other interlocutors (as well as the reader) to embrace love with all their force.[31] Thus after the first speech's explanation of love as conversion, the second speech puts forward protreptic exhortations to pursue the divine through love. The first chapter of the third speech in the *De amore*—Cavalcanti interpreting Eryximachus—also picks up the established theme of desiring celestial happiness or beatitude.[32] Given that the third speech follows the second's protreptic exhortations, it makes perfect sense that Cavalcanti's third speech follows the conventions of the protreptic genre by looking at how love directs the path of arts, disciplines, and sciences. After explaining how one cares for the body with medicine and gymnastics, Cavalcanti clarifies how love is present in the kindred mathematical disciplines of music and astronomy, and finally that priestly and prophetic arts teach how men can become friends to God.[33]

The *De amore* changes interlocutors with Cristoforo Landino's interpretation of Aristophanes (the fourth speech). Landino solidifies the general theme of man's desire for a beatification but does so specifically by explaining how man seeks his goal according to virtue theory: "But when God infuses (*infudit*) his light into the rational soul, he above all accommodates them to this, namely, that men are guided to beatitude, which consists in being in God's possession. We are led to this by the four virtues: prudence, fortitude, justice, and temperance. Prudence first shows us beatitude. The other three virtues guide us, like three ways, to beatitude."[34] Landino's virtue theory postulates that men are illuminated by inborn and infused (*ingenito et infuso*) virtues. He applies this distinction of virtues to his line-by-line commentary on Aristophanes' myth of the original three twin sexes: man-man, woman-woman, and the hermaphroditic man-woman. Humans, according to Landino's explanation of the myth, ought to be understood as souls, and their two parts represent a first half corresponding with the innate virtue to see similar and inferior things, as well as a second half corresponding to the infused virtue allowing one to see superior and divine things. This virtue theory in turn is guided by the conclusion that once someone's inborn light joins to its lost half, that is, infused divine light; "they will now be whole and in the sight of blessed God (*dei visione beatae*)."[35]

In explaining Agathon's claim that the god Eros is the happiest (*beatissimum*) because he is the most beautiful and best, Carlo Marsuppini further

employs the theme that love directs us toward beatification. His specific contribution to the conversation, however, is to introduce an aesthetic value to ethics by raising the point of the transcendental convertibility of beauty and goodness. In the *De amore*'s fifth oration, Carlo explains that beauty is in fact nothing other than the reflected splendor of God's face in the triadic metaphysical hierarchy of the cosmos: the angelic intelligence, the soul, and the corporeal world. His interpretation of Agathon's speech thus also follows the Neoplatonic triad of conversion, procession, and remaining. The angelic minds, he reasons, remain in tranquil contemplation of God's face reflected onto their own, whereas the restless and embodied human soul must work to turn and progress toward this beautiful vision.[36] He closes his discourse by calling on his friends to imitate the most beautiful and most blessed god Eros.[37]

The last two speeches of Tommaso Benci and Cristoforo Marsuppini, as I have already indicated, correspond to the speeches of Socrates and Alcibiades. Since the respective interpretations of the personae of Eros and Socrates in these two speeches in effect put forward an identification of Socrates with Eros, they act as the culmination in the ordered sequence of the *De amore*. That is, they present Socrates as a model person who has become godlike. He is both an ethical and an aesthetic exemplar for performative mimesis: by imitating Socrates one learns how to become a divinized philosopher and participate in truth, beauty, and goodness.

Socrates as Philosophical and Pagan Exemplar

Ficino also claims that the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* are twin dialogues: the former discusses love principally to speak of beauty, whereas the latter speaks principally of love and consequently also of beauty.[38] Just as in his interpretation of the *Symposium*, when Ficino reads the *Phaedrus* he reasons that love can make us godlike.[39] The terminology that Ficino employs to translate Socrates' discussion of the sight of the divine train of Zeus in Socrates' myth of the divine charioteer makes it obvious that he thinks Socrates is describing a beatific vision in his palinode.[40] That Ficino's interpretation of Socrates' speech in the *Phaedrus* agrees with the mirroring images of Socrates' portrayal of Eros and Alcibiades' Bacchic depiction of Socrates in *De amore* is made even stronger in a reading that Ficino puts forward in a chapter that he explicitly dedicates to explaining the divinization of the philosopher as "how the contemplator may become divine and emerge as the lover of divine beauty."[41] There, Ficino writes that the philoso-

pher observing beauty in particular things and bodies forms common notions, which in turn lead him to the innate ideas of beauty within him, by which finally he can arrive at the noetic sight of beauty outside him: "Hence he is filled full with divinity. Like a priest (for he is a theologian) he is said to have been purified to the utmost and carried off by the hieratic, by the Dionysian frenzy . . . it unites us more effectively and more firmly with God [or with a or the god]."[42] The correct way to interpret Socrates' palinode in the *Phaedrus*, Ficino contends, is according to the Platonic goal of fleeing from this world to become godlike in the train of the gods and feast on the fields of truth.

It is precisely because of otherworldly passages like this that Julia Annas has underscored a possible tension or even conflict in Platonic virtue theory, insofar as Platonism proposes an ethical ideal of moral goodness but a spiritual or metaphysical ideal of a disengagement from this world.[43] Platonic ethics seem to be pulled in two different directions. If the philosopher prioritizes the latter ethical goal, he will need further reasons to return into the cave, as it were, once he has seen the light. But this raises further problems. How is one supposed to be ethically good in society while aiming at a superior spiritual transcendence? Does virtuous behavior, then, become nothing other than encouraging others to convert and flee this world as fast as possible?

Dirk Baltzly has taken up these difficult questions in a recent article on how Neoplatonists understand the goal of Platonic divinization. The tension, he reasons, is more apparent in some Platonists than others. As a case in point, one ought to compare Plotinus and Proclus. Plotinus explains the assimilation to God as an experience of the Intellect (νοῦς); the self disengages and eventually detaches from the world in order to ascend and return to its undescended part in the Intellect. Therefore, the best and most blessed life, in the form of Plotinian divinization, conforms to a strong ascetic intellectualism: the most virtuous ethic is one of interiorization and contemplation. Unlike Plotinus, however, Proclus never proposes the impersonal Intellect as the sole god to which one must assimilate. Proclus preserves the personalities of the Greek Olympian pantheon, for instance, either by associating the gods with the henads, that is, the highest principles of unification that fill the divide between the One and the first being, the Intellect, or by identifying them with lower specific intellective, hypercosmic, or encosmic deities. His understanding of Plato's goal of godliness is therefore strongly inflected by Socrates' inspired speech in the *Phaedrus* on Zeus's divine train of charioteers, where Socrates explains that lovers will follow the gods on which they pattern their life.[44] In Proclus's mind these gods stand at the head of different noetic series in which

lower beings participate. As Baltzly reasons, the tension in Platonic virtue theory underscored by Annas is lessened in Proclus's philosophy, insofar as the virtuous assimilation to the divine is not an ascent out of this world to an impersonal Intellect but a participating in its noetic series and becoming godlike in assimilating to a particular god in this world, which "provides an impetus for a specific sort of engagement within the world."[45]

In a recent and enlightening article Leo Catana has expressed three important points regarding the place of Platonic ethics, more specifically Plotinian ethics, in Ficino's *De amore*.[46] First, Ficino's virtue ethics and exemplars fell out of the purview of Kristeller's systematic methodology.[47] Instead of looking for systematic metaphysics in Ficino, Catana examines virtuous exemplarity. He reasons that in the *De amore* "the protagonists are 'bearing the mask' (*personam gerere*) of ethically superior figures in Plato's *Symposium*, and the 'virtue theory' that we find in this work is not presented in the form of philosophical treatises structured according to a conception of the highest good, or indeed according to a system, but within such a model of emulation."[48] Second, contrary to Aquinas and other late medieval theologians who reserve the highest and most happy sort of life to saints and monks, in the *De amore* Ficino proposes the most blessed life to a more secular audience including aristocrats, men of letters, and businessmen involved in the vita activa. I would point out that this group overlaps with Ficino's epistolography network. Third, given the fact that Ficino ignores certain passages about virtue in Plato's *Symposium* and, most important, reinterprets Aristophanes' myth according to a philosophy of virtue (when Aristophanes' original speech said nothing of virtue theory), Ficino's *De amore* gains a certain independence from the *Symposium*, despite being its commentary.

Catana's insights are especially helpful if one places them in dialogue with Annas's and Baltzly's arguments about Platonic virtue ethics. If Ficino were to have responded to the problems put forward by Annas, one imagines that Ficino's exempla of virtous men could serve as forms of virtuous behavior in this world that bridge the gap between Annas's model of the two Platonic goals for virtue, that is, an ethical ideal of moral goodness that does not preclude political and social engagement, and a spiritual ideal of disengagement from the world. This divide seems especially wide if one adopts a strong Plotinian interpretation of Platonic ethics. According to Plotinian virtue ethics one progresses through a continuum of civic, purgative, and contemplative virtues, before reaching paradigmatic virtues. Most important, since the paradigmatic virtues become *paradeigmata* (or *exemplares*) in the Intellect, Plotinus argues that the perfection of virtue lies in the union with the Intellect. It is for these reasons that

Annas finds a tension in Platonic virtue ethics, since in her opinion it requires a complete disengagement in the world—a strong asceticism.

Catana thinks that Ficino's *De amore* is a masterpiece of Plotinian ethics. However, he strongly emphasizes the important role of paradeigmata in Plotinus's thinking in order to argue that Plotinus's ethics are not always as otherworldly as they are often made out to be. Equally, the *De amore*'s ethics are not strictly otherworldly and ascetic, insofar as they underscore the role of honorable exempla in Ficino's thinking. Thus, as Catana argues, contrary to Aquinas's employment of Plotinian virtue ethics (mediated by Macrobius) in *Summa Theologiae*, which concludes that perfection of virtue is reserved for Christians who live "a withdrawn and religious life," the use of exempla by Ficino allows him "to advance an alternative and more secular interpretation of late Platonic ethics."[49] As Catana argues persuasively, Ficino's intention is to steer clear of Aquinas's belief that the best life is reserved for saints and ascetic monks.[50]

By shifting the emphasis of Ficino's virtue ethics in the *De amore* from a strictly Plotinian reading to an interpretation of Plotinus's ethics that is strongly influenced by the generations of Neoplatonists after Plotinus—notably, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus—one does not need to make Plotinus's paradeigmata carry the entire burden in Ficino's virtue ethics. In fact, one sees how in the hands of these later Platonists Plotinus's fourfold progression of virtues—from civic, to purgative, to contemplative, to paradigmatic—the role of the paradigmatic virtues takes on a stronger mimetic component. Already with Porphyry one sees this emphasis emerge. In his *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry claims that Plotinus's ethical goal was unification with God, and that while Porphyry was with him, Plotinus achieved this goal four times. Porphyry further relates that an oracle of Apollo revealed that after his death Plotinus joined Plato and Pythagoras in the most blessed and happy life.[51] For Porphyry, therefore, Plotinus himself was a living exemplar of virtue, and passages like these in his *Life of Plotinus* aim at conveying this precise message. For Proclus the paradigms of virtue retain personal identities, for instance by becoming intellective deities (above the hypercosmic or encosmic gods, who can also be patterns of life) or even the higher henads, which stand at the uppermost head of the causal chains and give particular characters to the lower beings participating in their series. For Iamblichus, paradeigmata are also identified with living holy men and soteriological philosophers—godlike philosophers who have assimilated with the divine but live on earth. This model of later Platonic ethics appealed to Ficino at a very early stage in his studies of Plato. Indeed, I have demonstrated how

Ficino ordered his sequence of ten Platonic dialogues for Cosimo under the inspiration of a Iamblichean understanding of the progression of virtues, culminating in the paradigmatic life of Pythagoras, the godlike philosopher whom Plato follows most of all.

In his portrayal of Plato in his *De vita Platonis* Ficino sought to convey Plato as an actual living philosopher who is both the divine idea of the philosopher as well as a living human exemplar for other Platonists.[52] Ficino states at the outset of his *De vita Platonis* that he is adopting a Platonic style of writing to paint the colorful portrait of Plato, the paradigmatic philosopher: "I attempted during the previous days to paint the idea of the philosopher with Platonic colors. But if I had brought Plato himself before the public, certainly I would have pointed not to a certain picture of that idea of the true philosopher but rather to the idea of the true philosopher itself. Let us contemplate our Plato to see philosopher, philosophy, and the idea itself together at the same time."[53] In an article I maintained that the relationship between person, doctrine, and idea expressed in this passage could be considered according to the Ficinian concept that Kristeller identified as the *primum in aliquo genere*.[54] I would now argue that Ficino's *primus philosophus* should also be understood in Proclean terms as the head of a noetic series (σειραί) or order (τάξις). To reiterate an essential point, Proclus identifies the principles at the head of the different noetic series with gods of the ancient Greek religion. I think these Proclean notions help us understand participation and imitation in Ficino's philosophy. Ficino employs a strategy for Socrates in the *De amore* similar to that for Plato in his *De vita Platonis*. Socrates becomes a type of living exemplar for the philosopher qua lover. Explained in Proclean terms, Socrates is the philosopher who has climbed up the chain, as it were, in which lovers participate in order to touch Eros, the divinity who stands at its head. Once Socrates is back on the ground, so to speak, Ficino can identify the personae of the god Eros and Socrates with one another, and he can accordingly speak of Socrates as both a living philosopher and the highest ethical exemplar in the series in which all Socratics belong. After all, at the outset of the *De amore* Ficino introduces the gods as ideas within the Intellect in the very first speech interpreting Phaedrus's invocation of Hesiod's poetic wisdom that Eros was the first god to emerge out of chaos.[55]

In Ficino's exegesis, Eros is the first and highest leader of the first being's conversion (*conversio*) to God—that is, the first being below the One, the Intellect. Socrates is more than a participant in this series. His later identification with Eros means that he himself teaches how this conversion happens. Just as the Sun is the first in the series of all luminaries and heliotropes in Proclus's

philosophy, so Socrates is the first of the Socratic illuminated philosopher-lovers who turn toward Eros. This theory of virtuous exemplarity is distinctive from simple theories of virtuous great men, since it requires the imitator (the lover) to participate ontologically in the intellectual paradigm (the beloved).

Light and geometric optics, which Ficino uses to explain the action at a distance of both sight and sound, once more serve Ficino's needs in the *De amore* to form a metaphysics of participation that communicates the real presence of the divine across a spectrum to lower members in the linear series. In fact, Ficino employs similar theories for geometric optics and metaphysics of light in his *De amore* and his *De vita coelitus comparanda*, where he argues for ways in which one can draw down celestial influences by means of rays of light and vocalizations—both of which, he explains, communicate their forces through ordered series projected on linear vectors.[56] This does not mean that one ought to interpret the *De amore* solely and *sensu stricto* as Proclean. For one thing, although the identification of ideas with the gods may seem Proclean, the fact that Ficino makes them identical to the Intellect might make him approach Plotinus's camp, since Proclus and Plotinus disagreed on whether the ideas were prior to or identical to the Intellect.[57] For another, it was Plotinus's philosophical arguments about prayer that would later inspire Ficino's reflections in the *De vita coelitus comparanda*.[58]

What this does mean, however, is that Ficino reads Plato with the help of Plotinus, and that his reading of Plotinus is itself mediated with later Platonic traditions. It is only by gaining a clearer picture of the philosophical sources behind Ficino's interpretation of Socrates in the *De amore* that one can grasp, first, precisely why Ficino's Socrates resembles, as Hankins has argued, a late ancient holy man and, second, how Ficino is coloring Socrates, and indeed even his reading of Plotinus, with hues of—to quote Christopher Celenza—"Post-Plotinian Platonism."[59] I would stress, in this regard, that it seems that Iamblichus, just as much as Proclus, is once more important to Ficino. For perhaps more than any other work, Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*, which Ficino had already studied in detail prior to writing the *De amore*, engraved the notion in Ficino's mind that the life of the philosopher is a living ideal that one ought to emulate. The *De amore* is filled with performative mimesis, beginning with Ficino's prefatory letter to Cavalcanti with its Platonic salutation and its opening paragraph's claim that Ficino and his fellow banqueters were imitating Plotinus, Porphyry, and other Platonists in celebrating the day of Plato's birth and death.[60] The first work in the *De secta Pythagorica*, namely, *De vita Pythagorica* (*On the Pythagorean Life*, Περὶ τοῦ Πυθαγορικοῦ βίου), is more than a biography

of Pythagoras, it is the biography of Pythagoras qua exemplary philosopher and therefore quite literally an account not just of a man but also of the Pythagorean way of life.[61] To be sure, Iamblichus recounts Pythagoras's life, but he also explains how and why one ought to live as a Pythagorean, that is, as a disciple following in Pythagoras's footsteps. Iamblichus's Pythagoras is a sage, a living exemplar of the virtuous life, and a divinized human being, that is, a philosopher who has reached the status of a god; to be more precise, Iamblichus tells us that Pythagoras was even venerated as the hyperborean Apollo.[62] The aim of the second work in the *De secta Pythagorica*, the *Protrepticus*, aims precisely at exhorting and converting others to this kind of life. The *De amore* also has protreptic or exhortative aims. In a manner similar to the way Ficino dons an epistolary persona, as the author of the *De amore* he wears a Platonic persona in order to convince others to become in turn Socratic personae. Socrates in the *De amore* thus serves a role analogous to Pythagoras. He becomes the virtuous model to emulate for all who wish to adopt a Socratic way of life.

What is perhaps most striking about the *De amore*, and hithero has gone unnoticed, is that in discussing the goal of philosophy as divinization, becoming godlike, or the beatific vision, Ficino does not make a single mention of Jesus, or of Paul, or of John, or of anything else explicitly from the Bible, though he refers to the Platonist Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite on a few occasions (as well as making one very minor mention of Augustine). Ficino's omissions are revealing. Since in a few passages Ficino describes the goal of Platonism as the beatific vision of God's face, one would expect a Christian author to mention the biblical locus classicus for this image: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (I Corinthians 13:12), especially given the emphasis of Ficino on the metaphysics of light and geometric optics (to say nothing of the various metaphors and images he deploys for sight, light, windows, mirrors, and the like). Moreover, since *De amore* conveys that it is the central tenet of Platonic ethics that the human person become like God, one would expect Ficino to refer in this work to the teaching in Genesis that God created man in his own image (Genesis 1:27). Finally, since Ficino proposes living exemplars of virtue as a way to fulfil this Platonic goal, and more important since those who have achieved it become living exemplars and divinized persons—as is explicitly the case with the identification of the personae of the god Eros with Socrates—one would expect Ficino to introduce Christ and the ideal of *imitatio Christi*. None of these Christian themes is mentioned. This is not to say that Ficino does not refer to Christ and the Bible in other commentaries on Plato's dialogues. Any reader of Ficino knows that he does.[63] The force of the *De amore* lies precisely in

the fact that he empties his philosophical dialogue-commentary on Socratic love of overt Christian references. Instead, he writes in a different style and with an unequivocal and explicit Platonic authorial voice, which to his contemporary Christians would have been considered specifically in pagan terms. The absence of Christ in the *De amore* does not make the work anti-Christian, but it does reveal that Ficino has written a philosophical work on the deification of man that is based not on the mediation of Christ but on the mediation of love and the identification of goodness with radiant presence of beauty.

All orators in the *De amore* (Cavalcanti, Landino, the two Marsuppini brothers, and Benci) adopt the personae of the interlocutors whom they interpret; they accordingly need to speak in a manner appropriate to their subject. That Ficino himself adopts a Platonic or even pagan persona as the author of the *De amore* is a simple requirement of the dialogic genre. Just as Ficino's convivialists adopt the personae of Plato's symposiasts, so the adoption of Plato's genre by Ficino requires him to adopt Plato's persona as the composer of the literary banquet. Unlike Plato, however, Ficino paints himself into the dialogic portrait as a narrator present in the scene. His own virtuous performance requires him to imitate Plato's rhetorical skill: his ability to paint characters with vivid enargeia becomes a way for Ficino to place the Socratic exemplar before the reader's eyes. That he interprets Plato's rhetorical abilities to employ enargeia according to the late ancient Neoplatonists' virtue ethics reveals his interpretive ingenuity and habits. At that time it might have been the strongest case ever made by a Christian in defense of virtuous paganism, and one can easily imagine how this could have caused tensions and suspicions with Ficino's Christian audience.[64]

Controversies and Misunderstandings of Ficino's *De amore*

With this interpretation of the *De amore* in mind we can now approach Ficino's most prominent and overtly Christianizing remarks about the persons and lives of Plato and Socrates. In a letter, entitled *Confirmatio Christianorum per Socratica*, written to the Servite theologian Paolo Ferobanti probably sometime around 1483/84, Ficino complains that some people with poor intellect and judgment misinterpret what he has been saying. He clarifies: "Socrates, though not a figure (*figura*) as Job or John the Baptist, was perhaps a certain foreshadowing of Christ, the author of salvation, as if he were his precursor, so to speak."[65] In this letter Ficino appeals to classic biblical exemplars of virtuous pagans and Jews from the Old and New Testaments, Job and John the Baptist, who have been traditionally

understood as prefigurations of the person and life of Christ. For Ferobanti's benefit Ficino compares many typological elements of Socrates' and Christ's lives, including the fact that Socrates feared that evil can hurt the soul, and possibly even harm it eternally; that Socrates worked as a doctor of souls purging minds around him, turning them away from pride toward piety and the true love of charity; that he was pious and faithful to divine testimonies; that he was sent by and follows God; that he offers the other cheek; that he was accused of impiety while preaching piety; and that he endured his unjust punishment (perhaps martyrdom).[66] Although the practice of writing *vitae parallelae* for Socrates and Jesus goes back to the the apologetic writings of Justin Martyr, Ficino's particular typological reading for the life of Socrates might have surprised or even shocked his contemporaries—just as it seems all too foreign or premodern to many modern ears—since it in effect compares the primary testimonies for their lives to one another: the Platonic corpus and the Bible.[67] Like Socrates, Jesus did not write. This is also exactly why Ficino writes that Socrates remains silent regarding any of his own words and deeds, and that he leaves it for his disciples to record them in writing. Moreover, like Christians, Socrates felt the sardonic sting of Lucian's sharp and mocking wit. If Ferobanti feared the pagan Lucian, Ficino reasons that not all pagans are to blame, since the writings of Socrates, who suffered the same fate as Christ, can help argue against Lucian's cynicism and impiety.[68]

While a few scholars have studied Ficino's letter to Ferobanti, so far no one has remarked that in the letter Ficino also wishes to soften the reception of his own *De amore*, which he wrote and circulated as early as 1469 but was printed for the first time in 1484, near the same time as his exchange of letters with Ferobanti.[69] There are explicit intertextual references that require us to read the letter to Ferobanti in light of Ficino's *De amore*. Once this is recognized, the letter to Ferobanti in turn helps us discern Ficino's designs for his *De amore*. In the letter to Ferobanti, Ficino begins by stating that he is being misinterpreted, without mentioning the specific text in question: "Paul, my virtuous friend, but for my fear that there will be several who, because of the depravity of their intellect or the narrowness of their judgement, will interpret individual aspects of my meaning otherwise than I intend."[70] Which of Ficino's texts in particular are misinterpreted? Ficino does not say.[71] The letter is clear, however, that it is his presentation of the figure of Socrates that received a problematic interpretation. Nowhere in his writings does Ficino explain the persona of Socrates so vividly as in the *De amore*, and so it would only make sense to turn there. More specifically, in the letter to Ferobanti Ficino explicates the same virtue theory that he employs in the *De amore* (through Landino's interpretation of Aristo-

phanes' myth), namely, by presenting the two categories of virtuous inborn (*ingenitus*) and infused (*infusus*) illuminations.[72] Ficino's argument comes to its peak in explaining Socrates' and Christ's transfigurations according to the same category of infused light: "For many and great are the things which are told concerning the divinity infused in this man [Socrates] (*de numine huic infuso*) and the abstraction of his mind from his body, and concerning, so to speak, a transfiguration (*quasi quadam transfiguratione*). But a letter would not easily contain these matters, nor perhaps would some receive them with good will, thinking perhaps that I was now setting up Socrates as a rival [of Christ] when I intended him as a defender."[73] In *De amore* Ficino writes that our innate light is our inborn reason, and as he says in the letter to Ferobanti and in the *De amore* alike, with it one can begin to turn away from the things of the world. Landino, Ficino's interlocutor in the *De amore*, interprets the hubristic rebellion of the primitive men in Aristophanes' tale as something akin to a fall: relying solely on innate reason makes one prideful, but by way of a light infused from the heavens one can return to the divine and become godlike. Landino's account of the fall has no explicit references to Christianity, but its parallel would have stood out to his Christian audience.

Ficino's letter to Ferobanti is about misinterpretation. Ficino writes—perhaps out of modesty but probably out of fear of having his writings misconstrued, as the *Phaedrus* taught him—that he prefers to remain silent on the question of Socrates' transfiguration, insofar as a letter cannot easily encapsulate his meaning. I think I can help fill in Ficino's silences in the letter to Ferobanti with arguments from the *De amore*. As I mentioned, there are no explicit biblical references or citations in the *De amore*, yet the comparison to the transfiguration of Jesus to describe Socrates' godlike state is certainly telling. Whereas Ficino explained divinization through a Platonic persona in the *De amore*, in the letter to Ferobanti he speaks as a Christian and accordingly translates his ideas into a Christian register. The transfiguration on the mount is one of the central mysteries of Jesus's life. This event reveals Jesus's divine person as the Son of God to his disciples. In Matthew's account Peter, James, and John see Christ's face (πρόσωπον; *facies*) shine like the sun as he converses with Elijah and Moses. Peter offers to make three tabernacles for them, when a bright cloud appears and a disembodied voice declares: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:1–9, King James). The passage speaks of Christ's radiant face (*prosopon*) and person (*prosopon*), and it reveals Christ's persona (*prosopon*) to be the Son of God as it is infused with divine light. Ficino is making the comparison between the biblical transfiguration of

Christ and the Platonic goal of the divinization of man as clearly as possible: both are face to face in the presence of God.

Given the fact that in the *De amore* Ficino sets up Socrates as *the* godlike virtuous pagan philosopher and as *the* exemplar for imitation, and that he does so purely in Platonic or pagan terms, as it were, one begins to grasp the nature of the accusation to which he responds in his letter to Ferobanti. One can reasonably understand why, as he tells his audience in the closing words of his letter to Ferobanti, some people think that he is making Socrates a competitor (*aemulus*) to Christ.[74] We should understand these anonymous people as some of Ficino's critics, that is, the same unintelligent and narrow-minded critics, mentioned in the letter's first sentence, who misinterpret his writings. Ficino bemoans that he is misunderstood, but one begins to wonder whether his contemporary readers in fact understood perfectly well what Ficino was saying in the *De amore*. The two categories of innate and infused virtuous light, as well as the letter's closing words about the transfiguration, reveal how Ficino presents Socrates as a pagan soteriological figure not just for ancient Athenians but also for Ficino's own Christian contemporaries. His *De amore* is, therefore, much more than an impartial scholastic commentary on Plato's *Symposium*. The *De amore* asks its readers to enter into the game, invites them to imitate the philosopher in order to enact philosophical virtue by always striving to become like the highest ideal, a divinized and radiant Socrates. Ficino's letter to Ferobanti is something of an apology for the *De amore*'s portrayal of Socrates.

Ficino also felt the need to write two explicit apologies for his *De vita libri tres*. Published in 1489, the third book of the *De vita* in particular, the *De vita coelitus comparanda*, provoked criticism from ecclesiastical quarters. The *De vita*, like the *De amore*, was one of Ficino's most popular works. It eventually became a Renaissance best seller and inspired various early modern theories of magic, astrology, melancholy, and genius.[75] The exact source of suspicion directed at Ficino's *De vita* is difficult to identify, but it is not difficult to gauge that it was strongly criticized and to locate the involvement of the Roman Curia in this controversy. Ficino must have felt considerably threatened, since he undertook a letter campaign to defend himself. Already in the Introduction to the present book I discussed an important dossier of letters that Ficino wrote to the Venetian cardinal Marco Barbo and his personal secretary Antonio Calderini to mitigate Rome's suspicions. In addition to these letters, Ficino also wrote two explicit apologies. On 15 September 1489 he sent the first letter to three Pieros: Piero Nero, Piero Guicciardini, and Piero Soderini. He wrote the second letter, dated the following day, punning on *canes*, to his three Platonic guard

dogs: Bernardo Canigiani, Giovanni Canacci, and Amerigo Corsini. In these missives sent to two groups of three, Ficino tries to drum up support from other defenders as well, invoking the help of Cristoforo Landino, Angelo Poliziano, and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in the first letter, and of Giorgio Benigno Salviati in the second.[76] A number of other letters from the period also speak to the controversy, of which perhaps the one that brought the greatest relief to Ficino was a letter sent to him by Ermolao Barbaro in 1490 letting Ficino know that Barbaro had intervened in the Curia on Ficino's behalf and that Pope Innocent VIII even spoke well of Ficino.[77] Instead of kowtowing to his critics Ficino defended his work and tried to bring it to the attention of a great number of leading lights. With this end in mind he began a minor propaganda campaign, sending a number of dedicatory copies of the *De vita* to his extended network, including Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici, Iacopo Martini, the younger Lorenzo de' Medici, Iacopo Antiquario, Pierleone Leoni da Spoleto, and Martino Uranio. Moreover, he dedicated the *De vita* to powerful patrons, the first book to Lorenzo de' Medici, the second book to Filippo Valori, and the third and most controversial book to King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary.[78]

Among the lesser-known recipients of a dedicatory copy of the *De vita* was none other than the theologian Paolo Ferobanti.[79] The controversies that surround the *De vita* are now fairly well known to scholars of Ficino and the Renaissance. That there were also controversies about the *De amore* still seems to be ignored. These controversies were perhaps less worrisome to Ficino compared to those that followed in the wake of the *De vita* and might even have had a friendlier tone. Nevertheless, they help explain how the later controversies about the *De vita* did not emerge completely out of the blue. By 1489–90 a large portion of Ficino's literary and philosophical production had been printed (including his 1484 Latin Plato), and his Platonic letters had long circulated far and wide. Much of the criticism directed at Ficino might have been fomenting for some time before the *De vita* set it off with a new spark. It only makes sense that his famous *De amore* would have played a part in the reception of the *De vita*. As in the *De vita*, in the *De amore* Ficino also employs geometric optics and metaphysics of light to explain how celestial influences are communicated at a distance. A few years after he defended himself to Ferobanti for his treatment of Socrates in the *De amore*, Ferobanti received his dedicatory copy of the *De vita*. He would have found in its pages the same thesis about Socrates from the *De amore*, condensed in a few words in the closing chapter of the first book: "Thus if we are enjoined by Socrates to cultivate our mind by behaving in the best way to the end that with a serene mind we may the more easily acquire the light and

truth which we sought by the instict of nature, how much more is it right to venerate above all the divine truth by holy religion?"[80] Here, as in the *De amore*, Ficino argues that Socrates encourages us to excercise our innate reason and virtues in order to receive the infused divine light of knowledge.

Ficino's letter to Ferobanti is not the only document that bears witness to the controversies that surrounded the *De amore*. A few years earlier, the former chancellor of Volterra and Pistoia, Antonio Ivani da Sarzana (1430–82), wrote to Ficino about his *De amore*.[81] Ficino and Ivani seem to have had a rather friendly relationship.[82] Ivani writes about Ficino's *De amore* in a few letters, but it is one letter in particular, written on 12 February 1479 and entitled *De Socratis continentissimi anima*, that is of present interest, since it focuses on Ficino's interpretation of Socrates. Kristeller has edited the letter from a manuscript in Sarzana that preserves Ivani's epistolography, but as far as I have been able to ascertain only one scholar has written about it, and that was just a few words fifty years ago.[83]

Ivani begins his letter with a story that seems to have been inspired by his countrymen Pope Nicholas V and his half brother Cardinal Filippo Calandrini. He recounts that he knew an inexperienced priest from his country who was more skilled at fishing than anything else. This man's older brother, however, was exceptionally virtuous and eventually became pope. Once he was pope, the older brother elevated his younger brother to the cardinalate. This younger cardinal, now rich, still took so much pleasure in fishing that people began to whisper that he was better suited to be a big fish than a big man, so to speak. The story, which plays with the image of Christ's apostles as fishermen of souls, is a humorous pretext to talk about decorum, hypocrisy, dissimulation, and Ficino's *De amore*.[84] Ivani explains that he is able to tell the character or soul of most men by their external traits but that "some individuals use a certain dissimulation or hypocrisy, by which most people are usually deceived." He continues immediately thereafter to his main point:

> I saw much in your *De amore* about Socrates, part of which I had heard before or knew from my readings. I think that his rational soul (*animum*) was in a most moderate state (*continentissimis*), either equal to or better than the parts of his body were able to show. And although he was humbly born, a sculptor, and would walk barefoot under a little toga, he bore a divine rational soul that was nearly invincible and the most steadfast, and he was the wisest of all the Greeks, as the ancients say and as you yourself admit. We know that God hands out justice in both direc-

> tions. Socrates was not Jewish, nor had our religion come to life in his day. Virtue, for mankind, in principle is pleasing to God. Divine goodness repels vice. Rewards are given to good men, and it is written that punishments are prepared for bad men. If we believe that either Socrates, the wisest and greatest of men, or the divine Plato was the most virtuous among mankind, will we think that their souls (*animae*) will depart and leave their bodies behind? If they are hurled down into hell, what good was their virtue? But if on the contrary their souls flew away to heaven, how will our holy religion respond? Someone might respond as follows: they were content (*contenti*) with human praise. This cannot happen to wise men and to those who know about the immortality of the soul. Besides, they know that God is the author of all causes, for a wise man cannot be someone who ignores God. You admit that I am cunning. Beware lest love trick you, for I see love overflowing.[85]

Playing on Ficino's identification of Socrates with the god Eros, Ivani warns that Ficino might be deceived and misled by Socratic philosophy. Ivani's letter raises a series of objections to Ficino's Socrates from the *De amore*. First, Ivani objects to Ficino's presentation of Socrates' persona in the *De amore*. He speaks of Socrates' external appearance, just as Ficino does in the *De amore* in placing Socrates before our eyes. Ficino's prosopopoeic interpretation of Socrates turns the philosopher's humble appearance into a profound irony concealing his godlike status. Instead, Ivani speaks of external appearance in terms of dissimulation and hypocrisy. In reality, Ivani suggests that there is no irony in Socrates' external persona. His humble apperance does not conceal his inner divinity; rather it appropriately confirms his fate, and since he is the wisest and (along with Plato) the most virtuous of the Greeks, it confirms the fate of all of pagans. Second, Ivani responds to Ficino's exhortations for Socratic ethics. He objects to Ficino's use of *beatus* and *beatissimus* to characterize Socrates and Plato. Instead of the true happiness and bliss awaiting Christian souls in the afterlife, Ivani suggests that all they can hope for—if one can call it hope at all—is modest contentment (*contentus*) in human praise. Lest someone miss the point, Ivani entitles his letter *On the Soul of the Most Modest* (*continentissimi*) *Socrates*. This brings us to the third objection in the letter. Ivani raises the traditional question of the salvation of pagans, and answers simply enough that Socrates and Plato cannot go to heaven. Since the highest aims of Socrates and Plato's pagan ethics cannot bring them eternal salvation, Ivani asks, "If they are hurled down into hell, what good was their virtue?" Their virtue it turns out is no virtue at all.

Ficino wrote a reply to Ivani's letter entitled *On the Salvation of Philosophers Before the Advent of Christ*. Ficino's letter responds only to the third point, whether or not Socrates and Plato can be saved, but true to his interpretation of Plato's corpus he includes Pythagoras in their midst for good measure. In saving all three philosophers, Ficino saves his interpretation of Plato's corpus.[86] In his response, Ficino replies in a fairly traditional manner to the question whether pagans are saved.[87] Before the advent of Christ, Ficino explains, Mosaic precepts were of two kinds: natural and moral law; and religious rites and religious laws.[88] Everyone could have known the former precepts, whereas the latter were divinely inspired. Ficino reasons that Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato were monotheists and knew how to be virtuous either by somehow acquiring the precepts of the Old Testament or by natural learning.[89] This was enough, Ficino concludes, for them to avoid eternal damnation but not enough to earn salvation. God therefore sent them to limbo, where they waited with other virtuous pagans and Jews for the revelation of Christ from prophets or angels. In short, if they did not have explicit faith in Christ during their life on earth, their virtue and knowledge could have brought them to limbo, where they could have received explicit Christian revelation.

Ficino's response to Ivani is very different from his *De amore*. The response seems to draw on a tradition that owes something to Aquinas in two ways. First, Aquinas aims at bringing certain pagan virtues closer to Christian ones by distinguishing between acquired virtues, which pagans could achieve, and infused Christian virtues, which depend on the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity.[90] Second, Aquinas claims that the Old Testament prophets did not have explicit faith in Christ until he became manifest to them in limbo, fulfilling his prophecy.[91] Ficino extends this possibility to pagan philosophers. In this letter, he still maintains the worth of ancient philosophical virtue ethics, but the idea from the *De amore* that Platonic ethics by itself can bring deification and beatification is gone, as are the Platonic arguments for the infused light of God's radiance and its reflection in Socrates' transfiguration and radiant face. Instead, Ficino emphasizes that one cannot merit divine bliss without the salvific grace of Christ.[92]

When Ivani wrote his letter, *De Socratis continentissimi anima*, to Ficino he was, it turns out, continuing a debate from the previous year with the Dominican theologian Francesco da Viterbo, *De anima Socratis et aliorum gentilium*.[93] Having received Ficino's response, Ivani tells Ficino that his arguments are exceptionally persuasive, especially since he has been debating this point with Francesco da Viterbo, who was not so easily convinced and argued that the soul

of good pagans can be saved implicitly but not explicitly. Indeed, in his response to Francesco da Viterbo, Ivani agrees with him on this point.[94] The question of Ficino's presentation of Socrates in the *De amore* must have preoccupied Ivani, since he continued to ponder the matter after his exchanges with Francesco da Viterbo and Ficino in the following year with a second Dominican theologian, Simone da Firenze. Once more, Ivani repeats—in some passages verbatim—the same objections as before about Socrates' salvation. On this occasion, however, Ivani invites his two previous interlocutors to the debate. Naming Ficino only as "viro docto Etruscae nationis," he first quotes and paraphrases the response that Ficino had written to him, before telling Simone da Firenze that another theologian from his order, namely, Francesco da Viterbo, hesitantly responded that Socrates could be implicitly saved but not explicitly. Finally, he asks Simone for his own thoughts on the matter. Simone, in turn, replied to Ivani's inquiry by saying that "the soul of Socrates and others like him [i.e., virtuous pagans] could be saved if, knowing the one God, they observed the law of nature and a moral life, as for example most patient Job, who was not Jewish but Arab, for Arabs inhabit Arabia. But if, knowing the one God, they worship vain idols, as for example we see with Cicero, then it is otherwise."[95] Ivani agrees with this judgment and concurs that God's judgment of souls is inscrutable.

In his letter to Ficino, Ivani in essence rehearses some of Augustine's arguments, as they were perhaps expressed to him by the theologian Francesco da Viterbo, against pagan virtues. For Augustine, virtues that aim at glory or worldly immortality are not actually virtues. Explicit faith in Christ is absolutely necessary for salvation and for virtue.[96] Francesco da Viterbo hesitantly argued that although he did not have explicit faith in Christ, Socrates could possibly—but certainly not necessarily—be saved due to an implicit faith in God as the author of the world.

Ficino's Socrates in the *De amore* challenges Augustine's views of the Platonists (and indirectly of all pagan philosophers) on two related fronts: first, by arguing for the merits of Platonic philosophical virtues on their own terms and, second, by arguing that these philosophical ethics are enough for beatitude. In the *De civitate Dei*, Augustine writes: "But if the philosophers invent something that is sufficient to lead a good life and secure blessedness (*beatae*), how much more just would it be to grant divine honors to such men! How much better and more honorable would it be were Plato's books read in a Platonic temple, rather than how in a daemonic temple Cybele's eunuchs mutilate themselves, soft men are consecrated, the insane cut themselves, or whatever other cruelty or depravity—whether depravely cruel or cruelly depraved—is normally celebrated *in*

sacris for such gods."[97] Augustine is certainly elevating Plato above Cybele's mutilated priestly eunuchs, but this passage's rhetoric nonetheless speaks to Augustine's Christian apologetics. If the ethics of Plato are so valuable that they offer salvation, then his writings should be read in pagan temples and he himself should be venerated. Augustine's point, of course, is that Plato does not teach one how to arrive at this blessed state, and the pagans should not worship his writings. According to Augustine, the ancient philosophers thought of themselves as virtuous, but because they lacked faith in Christ they actually practiced a false virtue.

Augustine also specifically confronts the question of pagan salvation in a letter in which he responds to an objection raised by Porphyry in his *Contra Christianos*.[98] Porphyry argues against the supposed justice and goodness of the Christian God because Christian belief holds that the souls of everyone who lived before Christ, and therefore lacked explicit faith in Christ, are condemned. Augustine's answer to this accusation at first seems simple: only those who have explicit faith in Christ can be saved. But it soon becomes more complicated: not all who lived before the advent of Christ are condemned, since it is possible that some explicitly believed in Christ before he existed. Before the advent of Christ his worship, known with different names and signs, was hidden (*occultius*), whereas now it is open (*manifestius*). It was accessible to few before, now to many. Augustine's response follows his faith in God's inscrutable providence. When and how God choses to reveal true religion is left to God's judgment. In fact, Augustine makes a very similar argument against Porphyry to conclude the first half of the *De civitate Dei*, which he dedicates to refuting the pagans.[99]

Presumably aware that such an esoteric answer would not satisfy anyone persuaded by Porphyry's doubts, in his letter Augustine proleptically turns the table on Porphyry and his followers by comparing Christ to their own soteriological philosopher, Pythagoras. "For if Pythagoras's disciples were to say for this reason that Pythagoreanism was not present everywhere and always because Pythagoras was a man, and it was not in his power to make his teaching known everywhere for all time, can they also say that in the time when he lived and in the places where his philosophy flourished all who were able to hear him also wanted to believe and follow him? And moreover, if Pythagoras were to have so great a power that he could preach his dogmas wherever he wished and whenever he wished, and if he were also to have with this power the highest kind of foreknowledge, he would have never appeared anywhere unless he divined when and where there would be men who would believe him."[100] Augustine continues to reason that Porphyry and his fellow Platonists know that they cannot object

to Christ because not everyone, everywhere, and at all times knows him and follows his teachings, for even the Platonists would never accept this objection either against the wisdom of their philosophers or against the powers of their gods. The only solution for Augustine is actually to ascribe these powers, which he had imaginatively given to Pythagoras for the sake of argument, to Christ. Christ chose to reveal himself at a time and place when he so desired. Augustine's treatment of Pythagoras, therefore, turns him into an inversion of Christ—perhaps even an antichrist. He becomes a false savior, someone who promises salvation to philosophers by intellect and virtue alone.

Augustine might have praised the divine Pythagoras in his *De ordine*, but here and in his later *Retractationes* he corrects himself. Comparably, in his *Tractatus contra Paganos* Augustine further critiques Pythagoras as a philosopher who, although he did not seek the aid of pagan gods, nonetheless does not require Christ's mediation and "made a lie out of God's truth."[101] Augustine, therefore, compares Pythagoras to Christ to refute Porphyry and his followers. As for Ficino, in the very last passage of his *De Christiana religione*, he does the reverse by comparing the authority of Christ over his apostles to Pythagoras's authority over his disciples: "we therefore we will bestow the highest reason of Christian teachings and promises once we have professed, in the rites of the Pythagoreans, 'ipse dixit.'"[102] There could be no better passage to underscore Ficino's and Augustine's divergent opinions about Pythagoras, and about virtuous pagans in general.

Turning our attention away from Socrates and Pythagoras for a moment, we also discover Ficino speaking about Plato in similar providential terms. Ficino at times understands Plato as a Moses-like figure: a pre-Christian sage and lawgiver who received divine revelation. Ficino synthesizes the opinion that he articulated in his letter to Paolo Ferobanti and in his *De Christiana religione* at the outset of his *epitome* to the *Phaedo*, where he refers to the letter to Ferobanti and another to Braccio Martelli *Concordia Mosis et Platonis* (which I will discuss in Chapter 5): "Our book *On Religion* proves what is quite well known in itself, that the life of Christ is the idea of all of virtue. In the eighth book of our epistles, however, I demonstrate that the life of Socrates is a certain image of the Christian life, or at least its shadow, and indeed the Old Testament is confirmed through Plato, and the New Testament through Socrates."[103] These associations are not always fixed and consistent in Ficino's writings, since there also seem to be parallels between Plato and Christ. While it is a common topos to call Plato divine, when one recalls Ficino's description of Plato in the *De vita Platonis* as the *primus philosophus* (as the link between the divine and the mortal, between the Idea and the man), one realizes that Ficino applies a similar

logic to Christ. What becomes clear is that for Ficino the ethical and spiritual fulfillment of Platonism is the divinization of the person, a promise to become godlike or unite with the divine.

If one examines Ficino's dedicatory preface to the *De vita Platonis* written to Francesco Bandini, one sees a continuation of this same reasoning. It begins thus: "Not long ago, magnanimous Bandini, a certain Plato was born to me on the birthday of omnipotent Christ. A Plato who, while he is greatly inferior to that Plato, his ancestor and our father, nevertheless seems as far as he is able—I don't know how—to be of a similar inborn quality."[104] Since this letter was written between September 1477 and 14 January 1478 and we know that the *De vita Platonis* could have been written as early as 1469, we can confirm that this is nothing other than a rhetorical device, if it is not clear enough by its language. Nevertheless, the *De vita Platonis* is supposed to have been born on the propitious and divine day of Christmas—thus bringing to mind the image of the Nativity and the adoration of the Magi, who, for Ficino, are representatives not only of the three continents but also of the ancient Zoroastrian, Hermetic, and Orphic theological traditions.[105] Moreover, not only is there a clear relationship between Christ and Plato, there is also a relationship between the philosopher, the doctrine, and the text; in other words, between the person Plato, Platonism, and the Platonic corpus.

Ficino also characterizes Christ in similar terms in his *De Christiana religione*. He writes that Christ is the idea and exemplar of virtue. He begins: "What else was Christ, if not a book of moral philosophy, in fact a divine book sent down from the heavens along with the same divine idea of virtue brought forth to human eyes (*humanis oculis manifesta*)?"[106] Ficino is once more employing rhetorical enargeia to put forward the *persona Christi* before the reader's eyes as a living book of morals, a breathing idea of virtue that stands at the head of a series of imitators of Christ. There are obvious levels of performative mimesis at play here. As Ficino says shortly thereafter, initially Christ had many imitators during his life before the world as a whole imitated him after his death.[107] The universal moral doctrine is united with the particular mortal. That virtuous exemplars and performative mimesis are central features of Ficino's ethics is once more reinforced over peripatetic doctrines in a letter to Lorenzo de' Medici entitled *Imitatio potior est, quam lectio*: "On account of which the imitation of Socratic character (*mores*) instructs one more truly on how to reach virtue than teachings on Aristotelian morals. Likewise, only the exemplar of Christ is much more beneficial to attaining an honorable and holy life than the discourses of orators and philosophers."[108] In a similar fashion, the text of the *De vita Platonis*

is the man, Plato, who is also the divine idea, the philosopher, who is also the doctrine, Platonism. Here, as in Ficino's portrayal of Socrates' persona in the *De amore*, one also hears echoes of the Neoplatonic idea that personified deities—the divine Plato, Socrates-Eros, and Pythagoras himself—stand as *primi* at the head of a noetic series.

Ficino follows his tripartite division of Platonic spokespersons by also including Pythagoras in the company of Plato and Socrates as virtuous pagans that one should imitate, as he does, for instance, in the letters to his friends Antonio Serafico and Giovanni Cavalcanti.[109] Just as Ficino compares Socrates to Christ for writing his teachings not on paper but in the souls of disciples, he makes a similar claim when writing to the humanist Lorenzo Lippi (1440–85) about Pythagoras. In this letter Ficino further reinforces the imitative associations that he makes elsewhere for Plato, Socrates, and Christ as living books.[110] It should now be evident that he employs rhetorical enargeia to make Plato, Pythagoras, and Socrates living models of virtue. Indeed, writing about Plato's *Laws*, he even goes so far as to say that Plato worships Socrates and Pythagoras as though they were gods, and that Plato himself was "equally human and divine" and a mediator between men and the divine—small wonder that Ficino thinks that Plato converts souls to the divine.[111]

Ficino: *Ex pagano Christi miles*?

There is a well-known story from the 1450s about Ficino's overzealous interest in pagan philosophy and letters. As the story goes, his enthusiasm for paganism led Ficino astray from Christianity before the Dominican archbishop of Florence Antonino Pierozzi (1389–1459), now venerated as St. Antoninus, counseled him to cure himself of this problem by reading Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles*. Like his former Dominican teacher Giovanni Dominici (1356–1419), Antonino was hostile both to humanism and to Platonism. And like the two other Dominicans consulted by Ivani, Pierozzi must have been suspicious of Ficino's enthusiasm for Socrates. This is not to say that Pierozzi's advice fell on completely deaf ears, since Ficino certainly knew his Aquinas very well, but Ficino never turned away from his humanistic love of ancient letters or from Platonism. This episode from his life supposedly happened well before Ficino wrote his *De amore*, when he was flirting with Lucretius (whose Epicureanism he later sometimes repudiated), and when he was beginning to devote himself first to Latin works of Platonism and soon thereafter to Greek Platonism. His early studies of Greek Platonic

sources spurred him to translate *Orphic Hymns*, Proclus's own *Hymns*, his *Elements of Theology* and *Elements of Physics*, Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*, and Hermias's commentary on the *Phaedrus*, probably before setting his sights on translating ten Platonic dialogues for Cosimo de' Medici.[112]

There is a long tradition going as far back as Ficino's first biographer, Giovanni Corsi, which reads this chapter of Ficino's life in the 1450s as evidence of Ficino's supposed moral or spiritual crisis of the late 1460s and early 1470s when, to quote Corsi, Ficino was converted "from being a pagan to becoming a soldier of Christ (*ex pagano Christi miles*)."[113] In the past few generations, scholars have reacted to Corsi's claims.[114] To understand this episode in Corsi's biography one needs to read it in light of the *De amore*. I am in no way arguing that Ficino had abandoned Christianity and had turned pagan, only that in the *De amore* he is arguing from what he and his contemporaries would have considered to be a pagan perspective (or persona), unfolding the possibilities of Platonism on its own terms for a Christian audience. Nonetheless, it is very possible that in his own day Ficino was thought of—or misinterpreted as—having gone native, or pagan, as it were. Indeed, Corsi writes that Ficino wished to speak with Plato, "the God of the philosophers."

Two fairly long passages in Corsi's life of Ficino provide evidence for the episode. It does not begin with the famous eighth chapter of Corsi's biography, where he recounts the entrance of Ficino into the priesthood, his conversion from paganism to Christianity, his work on the *De amore*, his readings and translation of Proclus, and his alleged idea to write a pagan *Platonic Theology*. One needs to begin with chapter 4, where Corsi writes about the Council of Ferrara-Florence, which took place when Ficino was still a young child:

> But at the same time the Council of Florence, at which Pope Eugene IV presided, was celebrated, and the Greek heresy was discussed in depth. Many men who were most famous in intellect and learning came with the Greek emperor. In this delegation there was Nicholas of Euboea, a man most learned in Greek and Latin, and the famous Gemistus Pletho, whom Ficino called another Plato (*Platonem alterum*), who was renowned equally for his eloquence and learning. When Cosimo often listened to him speaking in favor of the Academics, and receiving their highest satisfaction and the admiration of all, they say that he was ignited by the incredible desire to recall as much as possible Plato's philosophy as though it had an old right to return home to Italy. Indeed, this was granted to him not many years later, as though it were accom-

> plished with a certain divine oracle through Marsilio, who in his youth was exceptionally learned in the liberal arts, and through his study of Cicero he became devoted to Plato and set ablaze in love for him, so much so that, having put aside everything else, he turned his mind to this one purpose, how, approaching the threshold of the Academy, he could converse face to face and see Plato in person, whom nearly all call divine, and even the God of philosophers, as well as his family.[115]

It was at this moment in his life, Corsi relates, that Ficino turned to the Latin Platonists (Cicero, Macrobius, Apuleius, Boethius, Augustine, Calcidius, and the rest) to begin his Platonic education before he devoted himself to the Greek works themselves. One should be careful not to invest too much trust in the historical accuracy of Corsi's narrative, since, beginning with chapter 4, it follows rhetorical tropes of two spiritual biographies.

The first emerges from Ficino's self-presentation in his own writings, especially his 1492 preface to Plotinus's *Enneads*, where Ficino himself delineates his providential role of uniting Latin and Greek Platonic philosophy. Ficino sets the stage. Cosimo and Pletho worked at bringing about a Platonic revival against the backdrop of the Council of Ferrara-Florence, where the Greek and Latin Churches were briefly united. The whole document is governed by the strong theme of presenting Ficino's melancholic genius at work under the auspices of Saturn in every stage of his philosophical career.[116]

Second, concerning Cicero's particular influence on Ficino's turn to Platonism, it is clear that Corsi is following the biographical trope of Augustine's *Confessions*. Reflecting on his early life, Augustine famously explained that Cicero's lost *Hortensius* first helped him turn away from Manicheanism toward Platonism. The story is too well known to need repeating in detail. It is enough to recall that following this turn toward philosophy, the books of the Platonists (*libri Platonicorum*) then served as Augustine's second turn, reorienting him toward his final conversion to the Catholic faith. Corsi's biography of Ficino helps propagate the Florentine's public persona as a Platonic philosopher through this Augustinian lens. Ficino worked hard at fabricating this image of himself in his writings, yet he could not control this entirely—as the saying goes, *habent sua fata libelli*. Indeed, Corsi may have ignored the fact that far from simply imitating Augustine's relationship to Platonism, Ficino, by turning Platonic works into something akin to divinely revealed texts, significantly revised Augustine's critique of Platonism. Unlike Augustine's full conversion to Christianity, in this passage from the biography Corsi does not speak so much of

Ficino's ardent desire to have a beatific vision of God but to enter into the Academy's inner sanctum to see and converse face to face with Plato, "the God of the philosophers."

Corsi's account of Cicero's protreptic role in converting Ficino to Platonism aligns all too easily with Corsi's story of Ficino's bitter spirit (*spiritus amaritudine*) and pagan-inspired disenchantment with Christianity (*a Christianis plus nimio transfugisset*) in chapter 8 of his biography. I quote this chapter in full:

> At this time, Marsilio thought of completing the book of his *Platonic Theology* nearly according to the image of the religion of the pagans, and no less to divulge the *Orphic Hymns*, but a divine miracle prevented him each day to a greater extent so that he accomplished less in his task, having been distracted, as he would say, by a certain melancholy of spirit. It is said that the same thing afflicted St. Jerome with respect to Cicero. Indeed, at that time Ficino wrote his commentary *De amore* to alleviate his melancholic soul, if this were somehow possible. Giovanni Cavalcanti, a patrician and the dearest friend of Ficino, exhorted him with his counsel to write this book in order to fight against his affliction at that time, and so that lovers of empty beauty might be called back to immortal beauty. He tried many other solutions to brighten his mind, but all were in vain. Finally, he recognized openly that his suffering was divine in origin because he had strayed much too far and wide from Christianity. On account of this he changed his mind and translated his *Platonic Theology* according to Christian rites, and composed twenty-two [in reality eighteen] volumes on the topic. Afterward he wrote a book *De Christiana religione*, and there is no doubt that because of these studies he attained peace and consolation, and completely drove off all of his melancholy. But when he was forty-two years old he converted from being a pagan into being a soldier of Christ; and having received a sufficiently honorable yearly income from two priestly benefices that he secured through the work of Lorenzo de' Medici, he relinquished all his inheritance to his brothers.[117]

Corsi tells his readers that when Ficino was busy translating the *Orphic Hymns* (and probably Proclus's *Hymns*) he considered writing a *Platonic Theology*, "nearly according to the image of the religion of the pagans." While some have at times speculated on the relationship between Ficino's *Platonic Theology* and

Proclus's *Platonic Theology*, what is abundently clear to me from this passage is that Corsi is documenting that Ficino's early work was inspired by the admittedly pagan (if not also anti-Christian) Proclus.[118] In fact, I further argue in the next chapter, along with Saffrey and Gentile, that Ficino studied both Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica* and Proclus's *Platonic Theology* very early. Corsi here compares Ficino's motivations for working with paganism (which is best read as a figurative way to speak about his early Proclean studies) to Jerome's (c. 347–420 CE) own zeal for Cicero and conversion to a religious life. He tells us that following a period of pagan enthusiasm, a melancholy (*spiritus amaritudine*; *animi dolorem*) came to Ficino like a divine miracle, forcing him to abandon his pagan labors out of sluggish distraction and procrastination. Ficino tried to alleviate his melancholic soul by writing his *De amore*, at the urgings of his beloved friend Giovanni Cavalcanti. Scholars have too often confused Ficino's sickness and cure in Corsi's narrative. Ficino's melancholy was not simply a sickness of paganism. Melancholy, which Ficino believed could infuse his own ingenium with the divine, was a godsend that saved him from working too much on his so-called pagan projects. The antidote was too strong, however, and he sought to balance melancholy's effects on his spirits with the *De amore*. Once more, Ficino's own writings on his melancholic character color Corsi's biography. Finally realizing that he had strayed too far from Christianity, Ficino changed his way of thinking, baptized his *Platonic Theology* into the Christian rites (*ad christianos ritus traduxit*), and wrote another work, *On the Christian Religion*. All of this should be read in figurative terms borrowed from spiritual biographies leading to Ficino's culminating "conversion" to the priesthood (*ex pagano Christi miles factus*). In fact, Marcel has noted that even this specific Latin expression was something of a cliché.[119]

In its present form, even though many of its pages are filled with arguments from Proclus and other Neoplatonists, Ficino's *Platonic Theology* is very much a Christian document—albeit at times an unorthodox one that delves into pagan mythology. There is, moreover, no evidence that survives for a prior version of this massive eighteen-volume opus that is explicitly pagan instead of Christian. Is there anything, therefore, to the pagan episode of Ficino's spiritual crisis beyond traditional tropes of spiritual biographies? Revealingly, Corsi mentions that the *De amore* dates from Ficino's supposed pagan period. It is true that the composition of *De amore* falls within the chronological boundaries of chapter 8 of Corsi's biography, but these boundaries are quite wide, covering a period from the late 1450s until the mid-1470s, a time, for instance, when Ficino also translated Plato's dialogues and the *Corpus Hermeticum*—both of which Corsi mentions in other chapters. Chapter 8 is devoted precisely to the trope of Ficino's

conversion from paganism to Christianity, and it is no coincidence that Corsi mentions the *De amore* in the precise section dedicated to Ficino's supposed pagan period. The reason for this, I believe, is nothing more than misinterpretation. To repeat, Ficino might have written the *De amore* with an authorial voice *ex persona Platonis* (and therefore *ex persona pagani*). Ficino was certainly fascinated with ancient myths, but he never professed to be a pagan, only a Christian and a Platonist. Simply put, as the letter to Ferobanti testifies, this subtle rhetorical move of donning a rhetorical persona, which was probably quite apparent to many of Ficino's closer convivial and intellectual friends as well as many of his letters' recipients, was lost on some of his contemporaries. For these contemporaries, whom Ficino characterizes as men of weak mind and poor judgment in his letter to Ferobanti, the absence of Christ and Christianity amid the *De amore*'s blatant Platonic arguments about beauty, virtue, soul, intellect, God, and Socrates would have stood out suspiciously. In fact, to many readers the *De amore* was probably their first serious encounter with an explicitly Platonic text, and to some it must have seemed daring and unorthodox, if not downright dangerous and pagan. For example, Janus Pannonius warned Ficino about his excessive curiosity and providential designs in reviving the un-Christian ancient pagan theology, mentioning explicitly how Ficino translated the *Orphic Hymns,* the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Pythagorean texts [i.e., Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*] and explaining the *Oracula Chaldaica* before he translated and interpreted Plato. Ficino, in fact, because of an anecdote in a later biography of Savonarola, would later earn the reputation of being a pagan worshipping at the idol of Plato.[120]

Ficino's motivations for writing the *De amore* with the authorial persona of a so-called pagan philosopher can be explained in two ways. First and foremost, as his large epistolography also demonstrates, the profound study by Ficino of Plato's corpus shaped his authorial persona as a Platonic philosopher. Second, the idea of writing—even positively—about paganism is far from abnormal. As John Marenbon has recently argued at length, the question of paganism is perennial in Christianity. Most important, Christian philosophical and theological discussions about paganism more often than not have nothing to do with actual encounters with pagans and everything to do with Christianity's own identity as an exclusive religion worshipping the only God. Indeed, Marenbon identifies Augustine and Boethius as the two most influential archetypes for medieval writings about paganism. He correctly argues that the figure of Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation of Philosophy* is explicitly pagan and in dialogue with a Christian interlocutor.[121] In broad terms, following Marenbon's categories, Ficino's *De amore* is closer in approach to Boethius in one particular

way. It shares something of Boethius's strategy in producing a dialogue between a Christian audience and a pagan figure for philosophy: Socrates. This is not to say that Boethius's Lady Philosophy directly inspires Ficino's portrayal of Socrates, but the *Consolation of Philosophy* and the *De amore* do share certain similarities. Since they are both works explicitly about pagan philosophy written by Christians, a certain dialogic device—irony or personification—is necessary. In the case of Boethius he introduces the personification of Lady Philosophy, in the case of Ficino he develops complex layers of personification between his interlocutors and Plato's characters, as well as between his authorial persona and Plato's persona, and finally in the culminating discussion of Alcibiades' identification of the personae of Socrates and Eros.

By placing the personae of Socrates and Eros before our eyes (*Socratis personam ante oculos ponit*) as a living exemplar of virtue, in the *De amore* Ficino employs line-by-line explications of their figures as well as extensive philosophical interpretations. He presents his audience with Socrates' and Eros's vivid characteristics—Diotima paints Eros as barefoot, Alcibiades describes Socrates as walking without shoes—in order to communicate their shared character. This is precisely the kind of variety and detail required by enargeia to communicate someone's inner person through external traits. It is also precisely what Ficino does in his Platonic letters. On 21 March 1473, he writes to the nineteen-year-old Angelo Poliziano, his junior by twenty-one years: "I picked up my pen, Angelo, so that I may extol this Homeric Muse of yours in wonderful praise to the heavens, but suddenly Cupid interrupted as follows: 'What are you doing, o silly Ficino, will you not ever stop turning round and round praising muses? Praise me, philosopher, if you wish to praise without flattery and mistrust. If you do honors to the Muse you honor only Angelo Poliziano, if you do honors to Cupid you honor Angelo and Marsilio as one. For I am your common love. . . .' He said this to me, Angelo, but I responded to him, 'Poliziano's Muse is truthful, and never compels me to lie. But you deceiving love, force me to lie daily.'"[122] Writing with homoerotic undertones that his love grows stronger every day without ever becoming impotent, Ficino creates a personification for a mischievous Eros, jealous that Ficino was about to extol Calliope as the Homeric youth's genius. Like Socrates in his speech in the *Phaedrus* on how one ought to avoid the lover, Ficino is about to offend the lover/god Eros by ignoring him. Yet the Eros that he depicts is also playfully ironic and deceitful. And as the common *spiritus* beneath the exterior persons of both Poliziano and Ficino Eros takes the form of one of the youthful masked *spiritelli*, the *larvati erotes* that would be frequently portrayed in Renaissance art (see Figure 7).[123]

Ficino writes two more letters on the same day: another love letter to Lorenzo de' Medici in the same vein, which I pass over, and a third love letter to Niccolò Michelozzi (1447–1527), in which he reveals that all three letters were quite foolish (*ineptus*). Despite Cavalcanti's supposed unique status, Ficino's love letters to often younger men must in a sense repeat themselves, first, to maintain the convention that Socrates directed his attention to numerous youths (to the jealous Alcibiades' annoyance) and, second, to establish a recognizable constant in the public performance of Ficino's Platonic and/or Socratic persona—an exterior that looks like the mormolukeion or the Dionysian leader of the satyrs, Silenus, but whose inner identity is Eros. The value of each letter resides neither especially in its individual merit nor primarily in its variety but in the overall strategy of presenting a Platonic or Socratic countenance to the world, that is, performing Platonic virtue and exemplarity. In the letter to Poliziano, by playing a Socratic part Ficino unites the three personae of Ficino, Poliziano, and Eros. Similarly, as the author of the *De amore*, Ficino adopts the role of Plato to unite the symposiasts from Plato's dialogues and his own convivialists in a figurative and performative relationship to drink from a common *krater*, Platonic philosophy.

CHAPTER 4

Pythagoras and Pythagoreans

> But when through these [studies of gymnastic, music, and ethics] the mind is liberated from the commotions of desire, already it will begin to become loosened from the body, and then its knowledge ought to be directed towards those mathematical sciences which deal with numbers, plane as well as solid figures, and their numerous motions. And since the ratios of numbers, figures, and motions pertain more to cognition than the exterior senses, in their study the intellect is separated not only from the appetite of the body, but also from its senses, and it turns itself towards interior cognition, which indeed prepares it for death, as Plato writes is the duty of philosophizing in the *Phaedo*. Through these means we return and become similar to God, as is learned from the *Phaedrus* and the *Theaetetus*.
>
> —Marsilio Ficino, from a public lecture given in Florence

Pseudonymity and Pseudepigraphy: Ficino's Use of Pythagorean Writings

Marsilio Ficino shares the prosopopoeic interpretation of Plato's corpus with the Pythagoreanizing Middle Platonists Eudorus of Alexandria and Numenius of Apamea (second century CE), even if Ficino differs from them in wanting to preserve both the Socratic and the Pythagorean elements of Plato's dialogues.[1] Eudorus is puzzling, not least because of the instability of our sources for him, but he is equally a fascinating figure.[2] He was called an Academic but was perhaps just as interested in Pythagoras and his disciples as he was in Plato. He is often considered, if not *the* first, then one of the first Middle Platonists because

of his return to a position akin to the dogmatic Platonism of the Old Academy. Although much about his thought and life remains difficult to ascertain, many consider him a pivotal figure in the history of philosophy, for various reasons. First, he puts forward the opinion that "Plato held many voices but not many views."[3] Parsing this brief statement, one sees that it agrees with his desire to read a singular goal into Platonic polyphony, which he identifies as becoming godlike. Eudorus's fragments contain perhaps the first strong distillation of Platonism into this single affirmation. The strong Pythagorean tendencies of Eudorus are the second reason he is often discussed. He is in fact often proclaimed not only as the first Middle Platonist but also the first Neopythagorean. A fragment from Eudorus in Simplicius's commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* relates that Eudorus explained that Pythagoreans proposed the One as the first principle of reality followed by two lower elements, another One or Monad and its opposite, an indefinite Dyad.[4] For this reason, historians of philosophy additionally think that Eudorus's Pythagoreanism paved the way toward Neoplatonic henology, insofar as Eudorus was the first after Plato to postulate a superessential and transcendental One as a first principle. Of course, if we are to believe his own words, he was not the first at all, since he was simply conveying the philosophy of much earlier Pythagoreans. This brings us to the third, and very speculative, reason Eudorus is still studied. Some scholars have been tempted to connect him with the origins of the production and circulation of Pseudopythagorean writings.[5]

Despite the temptation of the Eudorus hypothesis, there is a general consensus among scholars that the Pythagorean pseudepigrapha are heterogeneous texts dating from different times and originating in different contexts.[6] Distinguishing between two classes of texts, Holger Thesleff has offered the most canonical division of these writings. He organizes a first class of texts, written in Attic *koine* or in an Ionian dialect, attributed to Pythagoras and members of his family and immediate circle. These works are concerned with Pythagoras's life and teachings, and include such texts as the *Aurea verba* (purported to be a Hellenistic version of hypothetical *Sacred Discourses*). The second class of Pythagorean pseudepigrapha is much larger, written in an artificially archaic Doric prose, and attributed to various later Pythagoreans, most notably Timaeus of Locri, Ocellus, Archytas, and Philolaus.[7] The Pythagorean *Symbola* seem to date at least as far back as circa 400 BCE, and Iamblichus, who preserves the largest corpus of these writings, probably derived some of his material from Aristotle. As for the *Aurea verba*, a version was already circulating in the third century BCE.[8] The proposed chronology for the composition of the Doric pseudepigrapha has varied in recent times between the third century BCE and

the second century CE, while it is often thought that most come from a period between the first century BCE (or perhaps late second century BCE) and the first century CE.[9]

Historians of philosophy have pointed out that the Pythagorean pseudepigrapha help reinforce a dogmatic—often explicitly Pythagoreanizing—interpretation of Plato that emerged with the end of the skeptical Academy and corresponded to the beginning of what we now call Middle Platonism.[10] It might very well be a coincidence that some scholars have attributed the impetus for a prosopopoeic polyphonic interpretation of Plato's corpus and the composition of the Doric Pythagorean pseudepigrapha either to Eudorus himself or to his milieu. At the very least one can say that these two phenomena coexisted during the period between the first century BCE and the first century CE. What seems to be implicit but to have been largely overlooked by scholars is that these two phenomena mutually reinforce one another. There seems to be a hermeneutic circle at play. The prosopopoeic interpretation of the Platonic corpus legitimizes the circulation of the Pythagorean pseudepigrapha, and the production of pseudepigraphic texts in turn facilitates the prosopopoeic interpretation of Plato. Ficino is by and large a later culmination of this approach, conjoining Pythagorean pseudepigrapha with a polyphonic prosopopoeic interpretation of the Platonic corpus.

The present chapter is concerned with Ficino's excavation of the ancient Doric Pythagorean pseudepigrapha for his interpretation of Plato, specifically the texts attributed to Timaeus of Locri, Philolaus, Archytas, and Brotinus.[11] The samples that I consider below are exemplary cases of Ficino's Pythagorean exegesis. They stand out because Ficino explicitly names certain Pythagorean authorities, but there are numerous other instances where specific Pythagorean texts probably lie behind his invocation of anonymous "Pythagoreans." Pythagorean pseudepigrapha help Ficino understand the mathematization of nature and myths in the *Timaeus*, further myths in the *Phaedo* and the *Gorgias*, the doctrines of principles and the transcendent One in the *Philebus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Parmenides*, and the mathematical principles for knowledge in the *Republic* and the *Theaetetus*, and finally, on the whole, they assist him in uniting the goal of the Pythagorean life of "following God" with the aim of Platonic ethics of "becoming like God."[12] Before getting into these specific cases I wish to say a few words about Ficino's more general Pythagorean thinking and activities.

Ficino is familiar with both types of Pythagorean pseudepigrapha outlined above, though, as we shall see, he holds them to be authentic. In 1497 he publishes

with Aldus Manutius in Venice his translations of a series of largely Neoplatonic works.[13] He includes in this volume his translations of works that he had previously circulated in manuscripts, which are attributed to Pythagoras and his original community, the *Aurea verba* and the *Symbola*. This Pythagorean material bookends his entire career as a Platonic philosophy. Thus in 1497, two years prior to his death, Ficino publishes the same Pythagorean material that he had translated for Cosimo by 1464 along with his first ten Platonic dialogues. The *Symbola* consists of *akousmata*, or collected sayings, such as "don't eat brain" or "adore and sacrifice to the gods barefoot," while the *Aurea verba* are versified edicts for a Pythagorean life. Much of the *Symbola* and the *Aurea verba* is almost certainly apocryphal, but to Ficino they are some of the few transcriptions of Pythagoras's own oral teachings. Pythagoras's notebooks, or *Hypomnemata*, are also important for Ficino. He knows them through the pseudepigraphic letter of Lysis to Hipparchus, which he reads in its two extant forms in Cardinal Bessarion's *In calumniatorem Platonis* and in Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*, and perhaps in two manuscripts now in the Laurenziana library.[14] In a passage of the letter that Ficino quotes from Iamblichus in his argumentum to Plato's *Second Letter*, Lysis reproaches Hipparchus: "It is in no way pious, to make public the mysteries of philosophy with those who cannot even purify their soul while dreaming."[15]

If Ficino does not consider himself a second Hipparchus divulging the Pythagorean mysteries, he does present himself as an interpreter of Pythagorean wisdom.[16] He is indebted in this enterprise to Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*, since it contains the largest list of the *Symbola* and, crucially, a philosophical framework for their interpretation. In fact, Pythagoreanism is much more central to Ficino's early philosophical development than is normally noted. Ficino's translations of Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica* and Theon of Smyrna's *Mathematica* have never been printed, nor have they been the subject of a detailed scholarly study.[17] The study of Renaissance Pythagoreanism can therefore benefit from the older and more established scholarship on its ancient counterpart.

Modern scholarship on ancient Pythagoreanism has sought to clarify two sprawling confusions in the field: the first concerning mathematics and religion, and the second concerning Platonism and Pythagoreanism. As for the first, following Walter Burkert's critical work on Pythagoreanism, researchers have attempted to separate the scientific and mathematical dimensions from the religious or shamanistic dimensions of Pythagoreanism. Recent trends, however, now try to bridge the gap in these two forms.[18] As to the second confusion, two related interpretive perplexities regarding Plato and Pythagoreanism have long plagued

the field: the first surrounding Plato's actual debt to Pythagorean teachings (notably to the famed Archytas and Philolaus), and the second concerning later Platonists' tendency to read their own philosophy into Pythagoreanism. These two historical problems are often tangled together. Again, continuing from Burkert's erudite reassessment of Pythagorean sources and Thesleff's study of pseudepigrapha, recent scholars have provided detailed evaluations of fragments and testimonies of Philolaus's and Archytas's writings (those supposed authentic and apocryphal). This has encouraged a second revaluation of the actual influence of Pythagorean thought on Plato. While few would now wholeheartedly embrace uncritically Alfred E. Taylor's claim in 1928 that the teachings of Plato's interlocutor Timaeus "can be shown to be in detail exactly what we should expect in a fifth-century Italian Pythagorean,"[19] the question of Plato's debt to earlier Pythagoreans is still under debate.[20]

Concerning the first confusion in the field of Pythagoreanism, it should be said at the outset that Ficino's Pythagoreans are equally mathematicians, philosophers, theologians, and religious leaders. At times they are also holy sages and inspired Orphic poets. Recently I demonstrated through manuscript evidence that the third book of Ficino's *De vita* is constructed with the help of Iamblichean or Neopythagorean reasonings on how to draw down heavenly influences by attuning the soul through numbers, figures, and vocalizations, in order to achieve a union or contact (συναφή, ἕνωσις) with the divine. As Ficino's manuscript notes indicate, Pythagorean musical and vocal arrangements are essential to the theories in the *De vita coelitus comparanda*.[21]

Concerning the second overarching confusion in the field of Pythagorean studies, Ficino stresses the continuity between Pythagorean wisdom and Plato's philosophy. As this book's appendix shows, Ficino cites a large number of philosophers whom he considers Pythagorean. The list is already extensive even though it does not take into account his repeated references simply to anonymous Pythagoreans. His prosopography must have come from a variety of sources, but the final list of Pythagoreans at the end of Iamblichus's *On the Pythagorean Life* would have been very important.[22] Ficino's Pythagoreans fit into an ancient philosophical, religious, and theological tradition of which Pythagoras is also a member that is customarily called the *prisca theologia*, or ancient theology. In his most famous formulation of this genealogy, Ficino presents the lineage as follows: Zoroaster, Hermes, Orpheus, Aglaophamus, Pythagoras, and Plato.[23] He also utilized Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica* and Proclus's *Platonic Theology* (the Iamblichean connections are central, since his influence also stands behind Proclus) to construct some of the earliest versions

of his prisca theologia, namely, to connect Pythagoras to the Orphic religion of mysteries by way of his initiation into the mystery cults by an otherwise unknown figure called Aglaophamus.[24] Continuing down the genealogy, it is not only Pythagoras's personal initiation into the Orphic inner sanctum by the enigmatic Aglaophamus that presents problems of pseudonymity for Ficino; the transition from Pythagoras to Plato raises equally interesting questions, for which Ficino again seeks answers in Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*.

Timaeus of Locri and Philolaus: Pythagorean Nature, Myth, Principles, and the One

There are only two explicit references to Pythagoras and his followers in Plato's dialogues.[25] Yet Plato also mentions Philolaus and Archytas, and it has long been suspected that some dialogues incorporate Pythagorean teachings (the *Phaedo* and the *Gorgias*, for example, but especially the *Philebus* and the *Timaeus*).[26] For Ficino the *Aurea verba* and the *Symbola* may have been written records of Pythagoras's oral teachings, yet he believed that later Pythagoreans wrote works that Plato consulted in writing his dialogues. Ficino, for instance, drew on Proclus's *In Timaeum* to claim that Plato wrote the *Timaeus* in a Pythagorean persona: "Just as in the *Parmenides* Plato expresses with great talent all genera of the divine, so in the *Timaeus* all of nature is encompassed, and in both of these works he is mostly a Pythagorean, arguing under a Pythagorean persona (or mask). Indeed, in the *Parmenides* he imitates Parmenides and Zeno, Eleatic Pythagoreans who wrote about the divine, but in the *Timaeus* he follows Timaeus of Locri—a Pythagorean who wrote a book about the nature of the universe. However, he adds not only eloquence to them but also mysteries."[27] Two marginal notes in his hand in a Florentine manuscript of Proclus's *In Timaeum* confirm where Ficino found his inspiration. Next to Proclus's opening paragraph (*In Tim*. 1.1.1–15) describing the *Timaeus*'s skopos or goal (the study of nature as a whole) and how a certain sillographer, Timon of Phlius (c. 320–230 BCE), claimed that Plato took the material for his dialogue from the Pythagorean Timaeus's *On Nature*, Ficino writes simply: "The subject is on universal nature just as in Timaeus the Pythagorean."[28] A few folios later, where Proclus takes up the question of the dialogue's form and character (*In Tim*. 1.7.17–8.29), saying that once Plato had the Pythagorean Timaeus's text he undertook to write his *Timaeus* in the guise of the Pythagoreans (τὸν τῶν Πυθαγορείων τρόπον), Ficino is prompted to jot down: "The style of Plato is partially of the Socratic kind and

partially Pythagorean. He treats natural things divinely—Aristotle, however, is contrary [to this approach]—Nature is something divine, therefore, this book on nature mixes the divine with the natural."[29]

Ficino also read stories and rumors of Plato's supposed plagiarism in Diogenes Laertius and other sources.[30] In fact Proclus only speaks of a certain Pythagorean Timaeus's *On Nature*. Ficino probably could have concluded on his own that Proclus means the work circulating under the pseudonym Timaeus of Locri, that is, the *De natura mundi et animae*, but he also read the explicit identification in Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*, where he compares *Timaeus* 31c–32a to a passage from Timaeus of Locri.[31] This is not to say that Ficino simply reads Plato's *Timaeus* in light of the text of Pseudo-Timaeus of Locri. Proclus's commentary on the *Timaeus* is probably the most important exegetical guide for Ficino's interpretation, but Calcidius and medieval traditions of interpreting the dialogue would also have been relevant for his orientation toward the text. Ficino agrees with Proclus's account that Plato followed the Pythagoreans in mathematizing the elements of nature into specific ratios of linear, plane, and solid numbers.[32] But even then Ficino sometimes uses Proclus to find Pythagorean foundations to the *Timaeus*. In chapter 10 of his *In Timaeum*, Ficino explains that Plato followed the Pythagoreans in establishing the intelligible world as an intermediary between what is visible and the Good itself. As an image of the Good and the exemplar for corporeal beings, the intelligible mediates between the two.[33] To explain this tripartite schema for the intelligible world's mediating role Ficino also reads the *Timaeus*'s cosmology in light of the metaphysics in the *Republic*. He concludes: "But if you wish to arrange more aptly anything else that has been omitted, you will first consider the natural goodness and power in that certain architect; then the contemplating and geometric intellect, which holds the common ratios or reasons of measurements; thirdly, the practical reason, as it were, that plans its art through these same ratios; fourthly, the imagination, fashioning the figures and methods to bring together the work; fifthly, how it is executed; sixthly, its power to move."[34] Ficino is interpreting Timaean demiurgy in light of something like the metaphysical and epistemological hierarchy in the passage concerning the divided line in *Republic* 509d. He believes that the dramatic date of the *Timaeus* is the day after the discussion of the *Republic*, and so it makes sense that he sees a continuity between the subject matter of the two dialogues. But he is not simply reading one dialogue with the help of another. For reasons that will soon become clear, he follows Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean authorities in also believing that the *Republic* draws heavily from Pythagorean works.

There are other instances in his commentary on the *Timaeus* where Ficino identifies Plato's Pythagorean arguments, but I will provide one final example from the end of the work. Eudorus identified Timaeus's arguments at the end of the dialogue (*Timaeus* 90a–d) that God seated the intellect in the head as an instance where Plato argues for the Platonic goal (*telos*) of becoming like God from a physical and Pythagorean perspective.[35] The argument draws out a teleology in the *Timaeus*. Earlier in the dialogue (*Timaeus* 29) Plato wrote that the universe's maker wished everything to be like him as much as possible. The closing passages give a physical explanation for this teleology: man's contemplation actually makes him like the divine. Man's transformation follows the dialogue's cosmology. The world soul organizes the circle of the same and the different to move the heavens in harmonic intervals. Due to the mathematized nature of the universe the study of astronomy transforms man's intellect and attunes his thoughts, which had been previously disorganized at birth, according to the circular motion of the divine world soul. Thoughts do not simply imitate the eternal circular revolutions of the heavens, they physically assimilate to them.[36] Ficino gives an account of the process in his commentary on this passage in the summative explanations for the chapter divisions:

> Reason herself declares her divinity when she calls us back to the divine. But she appears especially immortal when conjoined to the intellect, her *daemon*, as it were, and meditates about divine things above all. The world soul, through its intelligence, accomplishes the simplest revolution around the higher ideas, but through reason it now makes a complex revolution around similar forms of ideas, which ought to be copied in the world. Through its power of movement, it also turns the cosmic spheres in a variety of ways. Similarly, our soul, when previously worshipping celestial things, was enveloped in happy contemplation around divine ideas, cosmic forms, and celestial objects, and with its equally celestial and spherical vehicle it consumed the circular motion. But then it descended into the human head, the part of us that is more akin to its vehicle. Yet, here it interrupted the original revolution. We are also able, however, to resume the revolutions in this life as much as we can through a certain imitation, by revering and contemplating what is clearly superior, as we did once before. Thus the rational soul is now entirely made in a certain measure similar to the blessed, and will become blessed in the present

> life, and in the future life when it will become the most blessed and when it becomes most similar.[37]

It is apparent that Ficino still holds the opinion that Platonism's goal is to become divine, and believes that Plato formulates the physical goal in *Timaeus* 90a–d in a Pythagorean persona. In the summary of the passage two important notions from Iamblichus's Pythagoreanism stand out: the identification of the intellect as a personal daemon and the vehicle of the soul.[38] Interpreting the blessedness (εὐδαιμονία) of our daemonized selves at the very end of his longer commentary on the *Timaeus*, Ficino is careful to explain that Plato's argument—in contemplating the heavens one assimilates to the divine by means of one's daemon (or contrariwise fails to do so in becoming a beast)—is formulated as a Pythagorean myth: "For he fabricates this myth appropriately, in imitation of Pythagorean myths, while speaking here under a Pythagorean mask (*persona*). But perhaps so that we do not accept these things as though they were historical truth, Plato leads us to the transformation of animals as the poets are in the habit of doing, and Timaeus of Locri in his book *De mundo* discloses this to be mythological."[39] Ficino reveals that he understands most of Plato's metempsychic and eschatological mythmaking as Plato's adoption of a Pythagorean style of writing. If one follows Ficino's advice and turns to the end of Pseudo-Timaeus of Locri's *De natura mundi et animae* (which Ficino refers to as *De mundo*), one will find that its author compares the mythical daemonological elements to the tales fabricated by the Ionian poets and the myth of Nemesis.[40]

Turning our attention to Socrates' contemporary Philolaus of Croton (c. 470–385 BCE), we see that he is one of the first Pythagoreans that Ficino mentions by name, and he remains one of Ficino's most important Pythagorean authorities.[41] In his vernacular tract *De Deo et anima*, written around 1454, Ficino writes that Philolaus agrees with Hermes, Pythagoras, and Plato on the music of the heavens, and he cites him once more (along with Numenius, Empedocles, Egyptians, and Origen) as believing in some form of purgatory.[42] Philolaus also appears in one of Ficino's first philosophical love letters of the type that I discussed in Chapter 1. In a letter from June 1458, once more to a "unique friend," Peregrino Allio, Ficino mentions Philolaus in discussing the opinion of Pythagoreans and many other ancient philosophers that friendship is the joining of two alter egos into one persona.[43] The philosophical notion of Pythagorean friendship circulated among Ficino's friends. Giovanni Pico, for example, draws from Iamblichus's *On the Pythagorean Life* in his famous *Oratio* to explain that Pythagoreans think the end of philosophy is the friendship that

brings individual rational souls into an ineffable concord with one another and with the Intellect above intellects.[44]

In his commentary on Plotinus, Ficino also draws on a reference from Iamblichus's *In Nicomachi arithmeticam introductionem* about Philolaus on number theory.[45] Furthermore, he is familiar with Philolaus's cosmological doctrines that the center of the universe is an unlimited fire, called hearth or Hestia, around which the earth rotates. Some consider Philolaus's cosmology an anticipation of Copernicus's heliocentric astronomy, but Ficino misses this point. His penchant for reading Platonism into his Pythagorean sources orients his understanding of Philolaus's cosmology. In fact, he reads what Philolaus says concerning the universe's central fire in light of Plotinus's identification of the earth's soul with Hestia. Therefore, instead of concluding that Philolaus's doctrines are heliocentric, Ficino thinks that he is proposing a geocentric mathematical cosmology. In the third book of his *De vita* he thus explains that some Platonists and Pythagoreans believe that all linear vectors of celestial rays converge onto a point at the center of the earth, a central fire called Hestia, and for this reason the ancients would erect temples to worship Hestia (or Vesta) in the center of their cities.[46]

The story that Plato supposedly received or purchased the "Pythagorean works" of Philolaus is of notable significance to the present book. Some accounts of this tale also credit these works as Plato's sources for the *Timaeus*.[47] It is now thought that Philolaus wrote a single work, but Ficino would have read in Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica* that Dion of Syracuse purchased three texts by Philolaus at Plato's suggestion, and that before Philolaus the Pythagoreans kept their entire teachings secret.[48] Some modern researchers now conclude that these writings are not a witness to the fact that Philolaus transmits a previous oral Pythagorean doctrine; instead he is an "inventor of 'Pythagorean' philosophy."[49] Things stood very differently for Ficino. Although certain scholars now think that some of the fragments of writings attributed to Philolaus are authentic, the story that Plato secured the purchase of his books is a later fabrication to create an authoritative intellectual genealogy that traces some of Plato's doctrines to Philolaus, and by extension to Pythagoras himself. Ficino, however, cites Philolaus as one of Plato's Pythagorean teachers, writing in his *De vita Platonis* that he traveled to Italy to learn from him, Archytas of Tarentum, and Eurytus.[50] In the 1463 argumentum to his translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (specifically the *Pimander*), Ficino places Philolaus as the penultimate link in one of the earliest versions of his classic genealogy of six ancient theologians: Hermes, Orpheus, Aglaophamus, Pythagoras, Philolaus, and Plato. By

1469, probably under the general influence of Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus, Ficino became interested in another pseudepigraphic work of purported ancient origin, the *Oracula Chaldaica*, which survived with interpretations by Michael Psellus. Having read in Pletho that Zoroaster was the Chaldaean sage who wrote the oracles, Ficino replaced Philolaus with Zoroaster on his list. Presumably Ficino was content with having one Pythagorean (*ipse dixit*) as a spokesperson in his figurative genealogy. The inclusion of Zoroaster rounds out Ficino's list by providing an originating fount of ancient wisdom corresponding to each continent (Zoroaster for Asia; Hermes for Africa; and Orpheus for Europe).[51] However, book 17 of Ficino's *Platonic Theology* (completed by 1474) shows that Philolaus still held a vital place connecting Plato to Pythagorean learning. Arguing against the various positions of Porphyry, Proclus, Syrianus, and Hermias for the infinite wanderings of souls, Ficino writes: "But to guard against their invoking the authority of Plato for their position, we have to bear in mind that Plato learned about the Pythagorean wisdom (which emanated from Zoroaster) from Archytas, Eurytus, and Philolaus; and that when he had traversed the world and examined all the other opinions held by philosophers, he eventually chose the Pythagorean school before the rest as being closer to the truth and the one he would illuminate in his own writings. He accordingly introduced Pythagoreans as debaters in his principal dialogues: Timaeus of Locris, Parmenides of Elea, and Zeno, from whom (in Plato) Socrates learned all that he repeats to others in the rest of Plato's dialogues."[52]

Although Zoroaster finds his place in this later genealogy, the Pythagoreans still take center stage. This is in part due to the fact that Ficino is discussing particular points of Pythagorean wisdom, metempsychosis and metemsomatosis. But he also states explicitly that among all philosophers Plato identified the Pythagoreans as coming closest to the truth (*verisimiliorem*). The claim of Plato's proximity to the Pythagoreans is as old as Aristotle.[53] More specifically, the concept of verisimilitude is important to both Ficino's and Augustine's understandings of Platonism. It seems as though Ficino is making a claim about the Pythagoreans' relationship to Plato analogous to Augustine's account of Platonism's relationship to Christianity, which Augustine states is closest to Christian truth. This in turn establishes an analogous relationship for the continuity from Pythagoreanism to Platonism; and from Platonism to Christianity. The Pythagoreans are so important to his understanding of Plato that Ficino even includes Socrates in their intellectual genealogy, since in the *Parmenides* the young Socrates learned about the One and dialectic from the two older Pythagoreans. Ficino thinks the same thing about Socrates sitting at the feet of Timaeus

of Locri, listening to the old man's wisdom on nature and the cosmos. Socrates therefore differs from the Pythagoreans not so much in terms of doctrines as in terms of manner of speech and argumentation. Ficino interprets Pythagorean dogmatic wisdom and Socratic aporetic philosophy according to the verisimilitude of Plato's dialogue form. Plato depicts Socrates, Ficino tells us, in doubt and debate, claiming that he knows nothing, because it suits his character and because the dialogues' interlocutors keep Plato's own views at a distance behind dialogic masks, revealing only glimpses of Plato while presenting Socrates and Pythagoreans before the reader's eyes.

Scholars of Plato usually point to three dialogues when discussing Philolaus and his possible influence on Plato: the *Phaedo*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Philebus*.[54] There may have been much that Ficino believes Plato learned implicitly from Philolaus's works, but it is in commenting on these three dialogues that he explicitly mentions him. The *Phaedo* recounts the philosophical conversations between Socrates and his friends the day before he drank hemlock. Plato never identifies Philolaus as a Pythagorean, but at the very beginning of the dialogue Socrates asks Simmias and Cebes (two former students of Philolaus) if they had learned why a philosopher ought not to commit suicide from Philolaus. Ficino does not explicitly mention Philolaus in his *epitome* to the *Phaedo*, but he does write that if the reader encounters Socrates putting forward positive doctrines for anamnesis—the theory of learning through recollection introduced in the dialogue to prove that souls have past lives—they should understand that Socrates is putting forward Pythagorean arguments.[55] Likewise, Ficino explains that Plato's use of the Pythagorean belief in metemsomatosis—that a human soul can animate an animal body—should not be interpreted materially but be understood as a form of purification, according to which our soul only interacts with animalistic imagination, similarly, it seems, to how Plato compares the soul to a wolf or lion in the *Republic*.[56] In the *Phaedo* Plato illustrates his point with swans. After relating that philosophy is essentially a preparation for death, teaching one how not to fear the separation from one's bodily prison, Socrates compares his plight to that of swans, the prophetic birds of Apollo who sing when they are about to die, knowing that a better life awaits them after death.[57] Ficino interprets the myth of the swan song as a Pythagorean allegory: swans, Socrates, and Pythagoras are all solar beings dear to Apollo.[58] The swans, as Ficino interprets them, are innocent men who know nothing of philosophy and do not fear their demise.[59]

Cebes is the first of Socrates' companions to engage the philosopher in conversation. Before the dialogue turns to the question of the soul's relation to

the body, Cebes asks Socrates about his most recent occupation as he awaits his death: adapting Aesop's fables to verse and composing hymns to Apollo. Ficino shares Cebes' curiosity. In Ficino's mind, as Socrates awaits his death he sings hymns and even plays the lyre, in the manner of Pythagoras, Empedocles, and ultimately Orpheus.[60] These are the Pythagorean musical arrangements and spiritual exercises (ἐξάρτυσις, ἄσκησις, and ἐπιτήδευσις) that aim at healing the spirit and attuning the soul, about which Ficino would later write in his *De vita*.[61] Although scholars still debate how one ought to interpret the *Phaedo*'s Pythagorean dimensions (if there are any at all), the matter seems to be settled for Ficino, but he reveals the specific contribution of Philolaus in the *Phaedo* only in his commentary on Plotinus's discussion of suicide in the very short tract *Ennead* 1.9.[62] In his fairly brief commentary (which is in fact longer than Plotinus's short text) Ficino compares Plotinus's opinion regarding the separation of body and soul with the *Phaedo*: "'Do not undo what God himself bound together, nor lay a violent hand on the members of God himself.' Socrates first introduces this Orphic opinion in the *Phaedo*, then he confirms it with the authority of the Pythagorean Philolaus, for Philolaus said: 'Do not cut wood on the road,' that is, do not divide the body from the soul in the course of its life, until it has reached its end."[63] Ficino's source for Plato's Pythagorean reference is, I believe, the commentary on the *Phaedo* by the sixth-century Neoplatonist from Alexandria, Olympiodorus, since he introduces this very same saying of Philolaus to gloss the same passage from the *Phaedo*.[64]

Scholars also still debate the more general debt Plato has to Pythagoreanism for his myths about eschatology, metempsychosis, and metemsomatosis. Once more the matter is clear for Ficino. Socrates often draws on Pythagoreans when he changes register, moving away from his method of elenchus, to expound by means of some of the dialogue's great myths. It is in a Pythagorean manner that Socrates becomes a composer of hymns and a mythmaker. Plato's use of Philolaus in this regard is also apparent to Ficino in one of the myths from the *Gorgias* (492e–93d). Late in the dialogue, while arguing against the formidable Callicles' case that happiness is the gratification of our pleasures, Socrates invokes a series of authoritative sources. First in the list is Euripides. Socrates says that the tragedian might be correct in thinking that life is death, and death, life. The other two sources are anonymous, as they so often are when Socrates introduces a myth or positive doctrine. To support Euripides, Socrates first speaks of certain sages (σοφοί) who say that the body (σῶμά) is in reality a tomb (σῆμα); he then presents the tale of an ingenious mythmaker from Sicily or Italy (τις μυθολογῶν κομψὸς ἀνήρ, ἴσως Σικελός τις ἢ Ἰταλικός). The desiring part of

men's souls should be called a jar (πίθος), the mythmaker explains, since it can be easily persuaded (πίθανός), but since it can never be satiated, it is in fact a perforated, leaky jar. These men with sieves for souls, the myth continues, are the unhappiest in Hades, since they spend their time there unable to retain anything of themselves. Commenting on this passage Ficino writes: "Socrates explains all this with the opinions of Pythagoreans, especially Philolaus and Empedocles, chiefly with a twofold way through myth and example, in which he thinks that each soul is indeed considered dead when it is in the body, and that thereafter the intemperate soul is assigned to Hades, where it is miserably busy with useless and constant drudgery while it contrives to fill with flowing pleasures a certain porous vase, that is, its insatiable appetite, with another porous vase, its depraved and deceitful judgment."[65] Given his fondness for philosophical wordplay it is really no surprise that Ficino takes an interest in this myth. His identification of the first anonymous sage as Philolaus reveals that he presumably knew the source, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215 CE), who records Philolaus's claim that "ancient theologians and seers" considered the embodied soul to be punished as in a tomb.[66] Clement does not speak of the *Gorgias*, but it takes only one interpretive step forward for Ficino to apply this testimony to Plato's sage speaking about the body qua tomb. Ficino's identification of the Italian or Sicilian as Empedocles could perhaps have come from Olympiodorus's commentary on the *Gorgias*, but it is even more likely that he read the scholion to the passage in the Greek manuscript that he used to translate the dialogue.[67] Ficino, moreover, would have known that Iamblichus understood the whole passage as Pythagorean, since he quotes these myths from the *Gorgias* verbatim in his *Protrepticus* as "ancient tales and sacred myths of Pythagoreans" without a single mention of Plato.[68]

Ficino's use of marginal scholia demonstrates continuity from premodern manuscript to print culture. Ficino transforms an older manuscript reading practice into his printed Renaissance commentary. His exegesis of this passage might be premodern, but it is certainly not naïve, since the two Greek manuscripts of Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica* that Ficino had at his disposal contain further marginal scholia which indicate that Iamblichus took this material from Plato's *Gorgias*.[69] Ficino thus had separate sets of scholia pointing to each other's sources, creating once more something like a hermeneutic circle. The scholia in his Plato manuscript attributed the myth to ancient Pythagoreans, while the scholia in Iamblichus's Pythagorean sourcebook claimed that these Pythagorean myths were lifted from Plato's *Gorgias*. The Pythagorean interpretation by Ficino reflects his general hermeneutical approach to Plato's corpus.

His Pythagoreanizing prejudices probably led him to read the scholiast to the *Protrepticus* as saying that Iamblichus retrieved these myths from the *Gorgias* and correctly identified them as Pythagorean, rather than, as a modern reader might claim, that Iamblichus misattributes Platonic material to ancient Pythagoreans. Nevertheless, much research has gone into the interpretation of this *Gorgias* myth, and the trace of Ficino's reading is still felt indirectly in modern scholarship.[70]

One final point remains to be discussed regarding Philolaus: Ficino's belief that his doctrine of the One and the principles of limit and unlimited influenced Plato's *Philebus*, *Sophist*, and *Parmenides*. In the *Philebus*, the dialogue's namesake hands over a conversation that he had been having with Socrates to a younger Protarchus. Philebus had argued that the Good consists of pleasure, enjoyment, and delight, whereas Socrates held that the Good was of a more intellectual sort (thought, intelligence, memory, and so on). In order to settle the debate Socrates and Protarchus agree that they are in fact arguing about different states of the soul that are thought to make men have a happy life (τὸν βίον εὐδαίμονα).[71] Very quickly in the discussion Socrates makes Protarchus concede that even though "pleasure" (ἡδονή) is a unity or certain one thing, we also claim that it takes on multiple forms and shapes when, for example, we say that moral and immoral persons feel pleasure. Socrates compares this to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), explaining that when knowledge is seen as a plurality, one particular form of knowledge may seem to be unlike another, but knowledge itself is never unlike knowledge.[72] The conversation immediately investigates how things can be both one and multiple (ἕν/πλῆθος); in essence the interlocutors ask how there can be multiple ones or unities between the prior simple One and an infinite number of multiplicities.[73] It is to answer this question that Socrates introduces the dialectical method of division, which, he relates, was given to or taken from the gods by a certain Prometheus and handed over to the ancients: "The men of old (παλαιοί), who were better than ourselves and dwelt nearer the gods, passed on this gift in the form of a saying: all things (so it ran) that are ever said to be consist of a one and a many, and have in their nature a conjunction of Limit and Unlimitedness (πέρας δὲ καὶ ἀπειρίαν)."[74]

This passage has sparked the interest of many commentators on Plato, both ancient and modern, and Ficino is no exception. Many modern readers of Plato have sought to identify the *Philebus*'s Prometheus as Pythagoras himself.[75] Carl Huffman has his doubts: "While Plato is not referring to Pythagoras under the mask of Prometheus, it seems beyond doubt that he does mean us to think of the Pythagoreans when he says that he is using a method derived from 'the men

before our time,' that is, Aristotle's Pythagoreans of the fifth century and in particular Philolaus, who is Aristotle's primary source."[76] Indeed, the fragment of Philolaus's *On Nature* (thought by Huffman to be authentic and preserved in Diogenes Laertius) refers to the principles of limit and unlimited: "Nature in the world-order was fitted together both out of things which are unlimited and out of things which are limiting, both the world-order as a whole and all the things in it."[77] Ficino never himself identifies Prometheus as Pythagoras, but he does indeed speak of dialectic as Pythagorean.[78]

Book 2 of Ficino's *Philebus* commentary is devoted almost exclusively to dialectic and the principles of limit and unlimited. It is there that Ficino establishes a strong connection between the passage from the *Philebus* and Philolaus:

> Matter is the first infinity of all things and in all things. All things are made from it and from the limit according to the Pythagorean Philolaus. Hermes Trismegistus calls the infinite "malignity and darkness," the limit "benignity and the splendour of God." Orpheus calls the infinite "chaos," the limit "ornament." Zoroaster introduced two principles, that is, he introduced prime elements from which all things are constituted, the good and the bad. In the place of the limit he put the good, in the place of the infinite he put the bad. [chapter 2] Plato accepted the two principles, [the infinite and the limit] and was right to introduce the two only after the one. The one is above all things; the two principles are what all things consist of. After the two, Plato numbered off three, that is, the infinite accompanying the limit, the limit in the infinite, and a third mixed from both. But when he mentioned the cause of mixture, he immediately introduced four principles. But in the *Sophist* Plato posited five elements in what is called "an entity." Plato understands by this something compounded from essence and being, although the term "entity" itself refers more to the compound's being than to its essence. Therefore Plato didn't say an entity consists of being, essence, rest, motion, [identity, difference,] for that would be six. But he posited five and left out being, because being plays the major part in the expression "an entity." So "entity" refers principally to the being given by the limit, which is above infinity, to infinity. Plato added five things to entity: essence (namely the infinity which being presupposes), rest, motion, identity, difference.[79]

Ficino is in the habit of identifying Plato's wise men, sages, ancients, and the like with Pythagoreans, as he had done in the example of the *Gorgias* discussed above, but also, as this example from the *Philebus* reveals, with his other ancient theologians. Nevertheless, Philolaus is given top billing on this occasion. Ficino compares his two metaphysical principles, limit and unlimited, to other formulations from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Orphic Hymns*, and the *Oracula Chaldaica*.[80] If Philolaus drew on older wisdom, it is on his two principles specifically that Plato draws. With these two principles, Ficino tells us, Plato formulates a metaphysics, or more specifically a henology, since it depends on the One as a superessential principle, to explain the problem of the One and the Many. Multiple beings, Ficino tells us, are formed by unlimited matter but are limited by the limiting principle as unities. Similar to the way Aristotle distinguishes Plato from the Pythagoreans, Ficino also writes that Plato postulates a Dyad below the One (instead of simply postulating a single unlimited principle). Ficino is even more specific. Below the Dyad of limit and unlimited, Plato speaks of a third principle, the being that is the intermediary mixture of both. Ficino is here developing a metaphysical series based on sequential numbers in order to derive multiplicity from the One. He locates the fourth principle at *Philebus* 23d, where Plato speaks about the cause of the mixture.

Eudorus was perhaps the first Platonist since the days of Speusippus and the Old Academy to interpret the One and the Dyad in Pythagorean terms. John Dillon has proposed that Eudorus's derivation of the twin elements, One qua Monad and an infinite Dyad from a prior first principle, a supreme One, originates in a reading of the *Philebus* where the limit and unlimited come from a higher cause, Zeus and Intellect.[81] Ficino interprets things differently. For him the limit is part of the Dyad (limit-unlimited), and while the limit could be thought of as a lower One, his explanation of the *Philebus*'s cause is again different from that of Eudorus. In order to continue his sequential derivative series (One, Dyad of unlimited and limit, mixture, cause) Ficino proposes an intertextual interpretation of Plato's concept of the intermediary mixture (μεικτή/μεῖξις) in the *Philebus* (23d ff.) with the possibility or impossibility of intermediary mixtures in the *Sophist* (ἄμεικτα 251d). Both dialogues speak of how Many participate in the One, but in the *Sophist*, Plato distinguishes, through the Eleatic Stranger, being from nonbeing according to the mixture of five great kinds: essence, change, rest, sameness, and difference.[82] Ficino therefore identifies these five great kinds with the cause of the mixture of being in the *Philebus*. At this stage, his numerical sequence becomes a little dizzying. The fourth principle in the sequence itself consists of the five great kinds. This leads Ficino

to say that one can in fact speak of the four principles from the *Philebus* as a numerical sequence of nine: "God [i. One], the infinite, the limit [ii. the Dyad], being [iii. the entity that results from the mixture of the limit and the unlimited], essence, rest, motion, identity, difference [iv. the cause of the mixture of being]."[83] Ficino concludes his exposition of the whole procession from the One to Many by explaining how the numerical sequence can also be understood according to the Neoplatonic triads of being-life-intellect and remaining-procession-returning: "You can't go any further because the three sets of three, which are in the number nine, make up the total power of one entity. For it rests, is moved, returns [that is,] is, lives, understands. You have three things here: [essence, life, intellect.] Again, in the essence there is life and intellect by way of essence; in life there is essence and intellect by way of life; in the intellect there is essence and life by way of intellect. So every going out and turning back is terminated in the number nine because, from the triple correspondence within any one thing through the sets of three, the maximum conversion into the one occurs in so far as it's possible."[84]

In his commentary on the *Philebus*, therefore, Ficino integrates what he takes to be the most important principles of Platonic/Pythagorean philosophy by deriving them in an emanative order from the One. To summarize his explanation, the One produces Philolaus's Dyad, the principles of limit and unlimited from the *Philebus*. Beings result from the mixture of both principles. Plato's use of mixture (μεικτή/μείξις/ἄμεικτα) in discussing the principles both in the *Philebus* (23d ff.) and in the *Sophist* (251d) prompts Ficino further to unfold the *Philebus*'s cause of the mixture of being into the five great kinds of the Eleatic Stranger (another Pythagorean, according to Ficino) in the *Sophist*. Ficino's deriving of principles does not stop here; in further integrating an explanation of the Neoplatonic, and especially Proclean, triad of being-life-intellect from the five great kinds, Ficino reveals his keen awareness that these three principles have their origins in the *Sophist* (248e). There, Plato devises a theory of motion and life for the intellect and intelligibles through the five great kinds.[85] In turn, since these dynamic and vital principles operate at the level of Intellect, Ficino associates them with the more common Neoplatonic cyclical triad of remaining (μονή, the act of being), proceeding (πρόοδος, the act of living), and return or conversion (ἐπιστροφή, the act of thinking).[86]

One can also summarize Ficino's derivation of principles by working from the opposite direction of the series, starting with the triads. He produces a mathematical unfolding of all of being (a multiplication of both Neoplatonic triads) resulting in the four derived principles of the *Philebus* (understood prop-

erly as nine once the cause of the mixture of being is itself unfolded into the *Sophist*'s five great kinds). The simple equation $3 \times 3 = 9$ is supposed to encapsulate the manifold unity of the series. Some modern readers might be dissatisfied with an interpretation of Plato that seeks to derive a coherent order of all metaphysical principles from the One (especially since Ficino finds Pythagorean roots for the Platonic method), but this should not blind them to Ficino's impressive feat. No interpreter of Plato since antiquity had attempted anything comparable in kind to Ficino's comprehensive metaphysical explanation, incorporating a detailed study of Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean principles into the interpretation of specific passages from the dialogues; and no reader in the Latin West before Ficino would have been able to do so, since none had access to and command over such a variety of Neoplatonic or Neopythagorean texts, as well as the complete Platonic corpus.

It is worth comparing Ficino's derivation of multiplicity from the One in the *Philebus* commentary to the manuscript notes to some of his possible sources. In 1968 L. G. Westerink published Ficino's marginalia to a manuscript containing Olympiodorus's commentary on the *Phaedo*, as well as Damascius's (c. 458–538 CE) commentaries, or rather lecture notes, on the *Phaedo* and the *Philebus* (which, to repeat, Ficino attributed to Olympiodorus).[87] Ficino's notes to Damascius's *In Philebum* §§ 98–117 study the philosophical implications of the principles of the limit and unlimited in deriving multiplicity from the One. Unlike in his *Philebus* commentary, however, in these notes Ficino does not attribute these principles to Pythagoreans, nor does he make the connection to the five great kinds of the *Sophist*, nor again to the Neoplatonic triadic principles of being-life-intellect, and remaining-procession-return. Clearly Ficino drew from somewhere else to understand the principles of limit and unlimited in the *Philebus*. The strong presence of the two Neoplatonic triads points toward the influence of Proclus.

In 1959 H. D. Saffrey published Ficino's notes to a Florentine manuscript that contains Proclus's *Platonic Theology*, *Elements of Theology*, and *Elements of Physics*, as well as the pseudonymous Pythagorean Ocellus Lucanus's *De natura universi*.[88] In this manuscript Ficino also wrote a short four-folio treatise entitled *Proprietas vocabulorum Platonicorum*. Saffrey believes that Ficino wrote these notes prior to 1463, and as I will argue below, I believe that his dating must be approximately correct. In these notes Ficino draws directly from Proclus's *Platonic Theology* to establish perhaps his earliest formulation of ancient theologians.[89] In a following section of his notes entitled *Ordo divinorum apud Platonem secundum Proculum*, Ficino explains how Proclus organizes Plato's

metaphysics into a hierarchical order derived from the One, followed by the henads or unities (associated with divine beings and gods). To explain this derived procession, however, Ficino once more appeals to Philolaus's principles of the unlimited and limit.[90] Immediately afterward, he presents the triad of being-life-intellect, as he also does in the *Philebus* commentary. In fact, he speaks of three triads (presumably also including the triad of truth-beauty-proportion) that result by way of addition instead of multiplication in nine entities and nine unities, that is Proclus's intermediary henads that connect the One to multiplicity.[91] Although Ficino's marginalia certainly do not correspond verbatim to the henological derivation in the *Philebus* commentary, they reveal an important source of inspiration. It is safe to conclude that Ficino drew specifically on *Platonic Theology* 3.8–14.[92] Proclus opens these chapters by attributing the principles of the limit and unlimited to the Pythagorean Philolaus and, also like Ficino, draws on the triadic implications of the Eleatic Stranger's arguments from the *Sophist* to understand the cause of the *Philebus*'s mixed being. This is not to say that Ficino follows Proclus exactly. There are certainly differences between the two, and Proclus's explanation in his *Platonic Theology* is more elaborate, but there is also a certain virtue or elegance in Ficino's more concise derivation of multiplicity from the One in his commentary on the *Philebus*.

Ficino would have known fragments and testimonies of Philolaus's first principles firsthand from Diogenes Laertius, Iamblichus, and other authors. He could have read Philolaus's principles into Aristotle's discussion of the Pythagoreans in the *Metaphysics* and could have applied it to the *Philebus* on his own, but the inspiration for his specific Pythagorean hermeneutical orientation with its complex metaphysical derivation of principles from an intertextual reading of the *Philebus* and the *Sophist* must have come from Proclus. That Philolaus's principles were just as important to Proclus as they were to Ficino is also evident from Proclus's *Platonic Theology* 1.5, where Proclus explains that Plato's Pythagorean philosophy in the *Philebus* reaches back to Orphic traditions by way of Aglaophamus.[93] In Proclus, Ficino finds an example of what Plato actually learned from his Pythagorean writings: it is not just a theory of the immortal soul but also the mathematization of the cosmos according to a superessential One and Philolaus's principles of limit and unlimited.

Because Ficino explains the *Philebus*'s principles and the *Sophist*'s five great kinds in light of each other, it is to be expected that Ficino would also understand the *Sophist* as principally a Pythagorean dialogue. The *Sophist*'s dramatic date is the day after the conversation that takes place in the *Theaetetus*. Socrates

remains relatively quiet in the dialogue, ceding the conversation to Theaetetus and an Eleatic Stranger, whom Ficino identifies as the Pythagorean Melissus (fl. fifth century BCE). A precise source for Ficino's identification—if there is one—is still lacking, but given his interpretation of Philolaus's principles in the *Philebus*, Ficino's motivation for believing that Plato is speaking through a Pythagorean persona in the *Sophist* is abundantly clear.[94]

Since Melissus himself is thought to have been the pupil of Parmenides of Elea (fl. late sixth and early fifth century BCE), and Ficino believes that Parmenides himself was a Pythagorean (and Socrates' teacher), we would expect Ficino to find these same Pythagorean reasons in Plato's great dialogue named after the Eleatic philosopher. I have already mentioned that Ficino, following Proclus's commentary on the *Timaeus*, believes that Plato writes as a Pythagorean, in the *Parmenides* about the divine and in the *Timaeus* about nature. It should also be noted that Ficino does not leave Philolaus's principles out of his commentary on the *Parmenides*. It is by appealing to Plato's use of Philolaus's principles of limit and unlimited that Ficino explains how the One is equated to the Good, is a superior principle to being, and is a source of multiplicity in beings.[95] Ficino's Pythagorean understanding of dialectic in the *Philebus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Parmenides* owes much to Proclus (even though he rejects certain aspects of Proclus's interpretation of the *Parmenides*), yet it is also indebted to Iamblichus.[96] A passage from Damascius's notes to the *Philebus* reports Iamblichus's Pythagorean interpretation of the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus. Ficino knows this passage, and his reading of the Promethean gift from the *Philebus* is broadly in the tradition of Iamblichus's interpretation, insofar as he thinks that Plato is drawing on a Pythagorean to explain dialectic. And it should not be forgotten that Proclus himself had followed Iamblichus's intellectual genealogy that Plato learned about the principles of limited and unlimited from Philolaus. Ficino adopts this account in his prisca theologia and in his interpretation of the *Philebus*.[97]

Dominic O'Meara has explained that it is above all due to Iamblichus that the *Philebus* held such an important place among later Neoplatonists. After all, Iamblichus placed the *Philebus* as the capstone to the decade of ten Platonic dialogues making up the Neoplatonic curriculum, corresponding perhaps in an analogous way to the *Parmenides*, which was the higher of the two dialogues that composed the second stage of study (the other being the *Timaeus*, all three essentially Pythagorean according to Iamblichus). Proclus's school, O'Meara argues, followed Iamblichus's opinion that the *Philebus*'s goal, or skopos, was not so much the Good as the superessential transcendental One but rather the

Good as the highest immanent Good in all beings.[98] The lecture notes to Damascius's course on the *Philebus* also record that Pisitheus, the pupil of Theodore of Asine, thought it treated the intellect. Damascius would later claim that the goal of the *Philebus* is the immanent Good only in animals.[99] These later Neoplatonists subordinated the *Philebus* to the *Parmenides*, which some have argued roughly corresponds to Proclus's subordination of Pythagorean mathematics to Plato's dialectic. Along similar lines, over the past century scholars have correctly pointed out differences between Proclus's and Iamblichus's understandings of mathematics. Proclus, it seems, prioritizes dialectic over mathematics, and in turn geometry over arithmetic and other forms of mathematics.[100] Yet drawing too sharp a distinction between the two Neoplatonists, as O'Meara warns, can obscure Proclus's own Pythagoreanizing tendencies and also risks losing sight of the fact that much of Proclus's thinking on the Pythagoreans and dialectic in the *Philebus* had its sources in Iamblichus. Proclus might have reoriented and adapted Iamblichus's Pythagoreanizing tendencies—sometimes keeping the arguments and terminology without giving a Pythagorean source—but he did not reject them outright.[101]

Ficino knew Iamblichus's assigned skopos for the *Philebus* from Damascius's notes. In fact, he carefully marks down each philosopher's opinion on the *Philebus*'s goal in the margins of his manuscript of Damascius.[102] In his own *Philebus* commentary he also broadly follows Iamblichus, insofar as he thinks that the dialogue is not simply about the superessential and transcendental Good. But Ficino is even more specific: he assigns the dialogue's skopos as the highest Good of man. This could perhaps imply that Ficino, like Iamblichus before him, conceived of another transcendental Good above the second immanent Good, which would render Ficino's nine principles discussed above into a culminating decade.[103] But this option would presumably be inconsistent with his identification of the One Good above the Dyad as God, since Ficino would not have easily accepted a principle above God. What seems more likely is that for Ficino the highest Good is transcendent when it is considered in and of itself—it would be the tenth principle that culminates and transcends the nine others—but is immanent when it is in men's thoughts as their highest Good. That is, as a metaphysical or henological principle the Good is transcendent, but as an ethical goal that humans can reach it is immanent. This possible solution would agree with two positions Ficino takes: his description of the nine principles (of which God is listed as the summit of the nine) as the product of the two intellectual triads, and his aim of finding a solution for mediating between the One and Many by way of a continuous emanation of the One.

Moreover, as the highest Good for men it would further correspond with Ficino's ethical goal of making man godlike by way of dialectical ascent. One should not forget that at the outset of the *Philebus* Socrates and Protagoras agree to judge which style of life (of pleasure or of the mind) leads to the happiest life, which is now understood as the most blessed life of becoming like God.[104] Ficino placed the *Philebus* last in the order of ten dialogues that he completed for Cosimo de' Medici in 1464. Even in this early work on the dialogues Ficino presented the supreme Good from man's perspective, the ethical goal for human virtue of becoming happy or blessed through divinization. This is the stated Pythagorean goal in the *Protrepticus*, and it is also how Proclus understands the *Philebus*'s Pythagoreans in *Platonic Theology* 1.5. Therefore, I am confident in concluding that very early in his Platonic studies the Neoplatonic sources (especially Proclus's *Platonic Theology* and Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*) Ficino drew on oriented his hermeneutics, encouraging him to read Pythagorean *mathesis* and *mythos* into Plato's dialogues. For Ficino, a correct interpretation of Plato's myths, as well as the correct understandings of mathematics and dialectic, lead one through the mathematical disciplines, through the five great kinds and the principles of limit and unlimited toward the assimilation to the divine One.

Ficino began working on the *Philebus* as soon as he picked up Plato's dialogues. The dialogue and its commentary preoccupied his entire philosophical career. The larger commentary underwent at least three versions and seems never to have been finished. In fact, it ends with Ficino having completed only four chapters of the second book, which are precisely dedicated to dialectic and the principles of the limit and the unlimited. This material, however, was already included in the oldest version, preserved in a Vatican manuscript.[105] Although Ficino probably only began to write his *Philebus* commentary as it is in its present form in 1469, it is clear from what I said above that he was studying Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica* and Proclus's *Platonic Theology* at an earlier date, by 1463–64.[106] It might be an exaggeration to describe this Vatican manuscript as a Pythagorean volume—whatever that would mean given the present debate on authentic Pythagoreanism, and especially given that in Ficino's day Pythagoreanism was closely intertwined with Platonism—but it is certainly a compendium containing some of Ficino's Pythagoreanizing Platonism. It includes Ficino's translations of Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*, Hermias's commentary on the *Phaedrus*, the Pythagorean *Symbola*, Pseudo-Plutarch's *De fato*, Ficino's letter *Concordia Mosis et Platonis*, *Commentaria Marsilii Ficini Florentini in Philebum Platonis de summo bono* (which contains both a portion

of his lectures on the *Philebus* and the first version of his *Philebus* commentary), and *Marsilii Ficini expositio de triplici vita et fine triplici* (a work that was apparently excerpted from Ficino's lectures on the *Philebus*, not to be confused with his *De vita libri tres*).[107]

Ficino's first biographer, Giovanni Corsi, says that Ficino delivered public lectures on the *Philebus* when Piero de' Medici was in charge of Florence (1464–69), and evidence survives in the manuscripts of his *Philebus* commentary to show that Ficino took some of the material from these lectures.[108] He divided one of these lectures into two letters around 1477. He addressed the first, entitled *De Platonica philosophia natura, institutione, actione*, to Giovanni Francesco Ippoliti, Count of Gazzoldo. The second letter, addressed to Francesco Bandini, became Ficino's *De vita Platonis* and later served as an introduction to Ficino's *Platonis opera omnia*.[109] The lecture (and later letter) *De Platonica philosophi natura, institutione, actione* establishes the close link between the *Philebus* and the *Republic* for Ficino. For even though the lecture was supposedly on the *Philebus*, after quoting Pythagoras to the effect that philosophy is love of wisdom, understood as knowledge of the divine, its subject matter is largely derived from the *cursus* of mathematical disciplines from the *Republic*. Ficino says that according to the Platonists (and I believe he has Iamblichus in mind here), a philosopher must study mathematics in a particular order: arithmetic, geometry, stereometry, astronomy, and music, since numbers are prior to figures, plane figures are prior to solid bodies, bodies without motion are prior to moving bodies, and movement is prior to the order and ratio of sounds. Finally, the philosopher, Ficino writes, ought to study dialectic. Having passed through the intermediate disciplines of mathematics, the dialectician becomes godlike. Indeed, the whole lecture (or letter) is largely a meditation on the ethical goal of Platonism to reach the highest Good and become godlike. Having explained the process of divinization of the philosopher, in his second lecture Ficino turns to Plato himself, as I described in the previous chapter, to paint a vivid portrait of his persona for his audience, which would then become his *De vita Platonis*.[110]

Brotinus and Archytas: Analogy and the Divided Line in the *Republic* and the *Theaetetus*

If Ficino reasons that Plato had Pythagorean texts and teachers to help him compose the *Timaeus*, *Phaedo*, *Gorgias*, *Philebus*, *Sophist*, and *Parmenides*, he also

believes that he had other specific works to help him express ideas in the *Republic* specifically through Pythagorean personae. We know from the anonymous prolegomena to Plato that Iamblichus (and Proclus after him) did not include the *Republic* in the cycle of Plato's dialogues that he taught in his school at Apamea.[111] On these grounds some scholars assume that Iamblichus paid no attention to Plato's great dialogue, since they believe that he and other Neoplatonists took no interest in Plato's political works. Yet O'Meara has argued that in the *De secta Pythagorica* there are a number of references that show that Iamblichus did in fact study the *Republic* attentively and concluded that it is a "Pythagorean document."[112] In Ficino's case, it has been correctly observed that one reason he finds Pythagoreanism in the *Republic* is that the dialogue's arguments on communal property agree with the Pythagorean precept that "among friends all things are held in common," which are also the closing words of the *Phaedrus* and constitute an opinion that Ficino believes is retracted in the *Laws*—a work, to repeat, that he claims expresses Plato's own voice.[113] Ficino, moreover, interpreted this saying through Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*, as he also did for other aspects of the *Republic*. Specifically, he turned to Iamblichus's *De communi mathematica scientia*, the third book of the *De secta Pythagorica*, to find Plato's Pythagorean sources for the *Republic*.

The *De secta Pythagorica* is structured according to a specific philosophical order. The first volume, *De vita Pythagorica*, presents the reader with a model understanding of philosophy as a way of life. The second volume, the *Protrepticus*, exhorts the reader to learn to convert his soul toward philosophy, like Plato's prisoners in the *Republic*'s allegory of the cave learning to turn toward the Good. The third volume, *De communi mathematica scientia*, examines the principles for all mathematics (a form of *mathesis universalis*). Thereafter, Iamblichus devotes each book to a specific mathematical science, which Iamblichus conceives, O'Meara argues, on the basis of Nicomachus of Gerasa's (c. 70–150 CE) understanding of the *quadrivium*. Most important for our present purposes, Iamblichus orders his mathematical disciplines on the basis of Plato's *Republic* itself. I believe, therefore, that there is an analogy between the formal structure of books 4–10 of the *De secta Pythagorica* and the disciplinary cursus of book 7 of the *Republic*. It should not be forgotten that in book 7 Plato himself says that astronomy and harmonics are "kindred sciences, as the Pythagoreans affirm," and that if one adopts their method in depth (διεληλύθαμεν μέθοδος) one can reveal their "commonalities and kinship (κοινωνίαν . . . καὶ συγγένειαν)."[114] If one follows the logic of this analogy, the *De communi mathematica scientia* corresponds to book 6 of the *Republic*, since both introduce the cursus of disciplines

in book 7. It is therefore for these significant structural reasons that Iamblichus introduces a discussion of the divided line from book 6 of the *Republic* in the *De communi mathematica scientia*.

The subject matter of the *De communi mathematica scientia* is not the individual branches of science (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy) but mathematics as such, that is, the mathematical principles (ἀρχαὶ τῶν ὅλων μαθημάτων) of all discursive reasoning employed by individual mathematical sciences.[115] Accordingly, it is dedicated to the metaphysical principles that ground epistemological judgments. After introducing his subject, in chapter 3 Iamblichus predictably lists Philolaus's limit and unlimited as the first two principles of mathematics. By quoting a further fragment from Philolaus in chapter 7, "there is no beginning to knowledge if all is infinite," Iamblichus seeks to integrate the metaphysical principles of the *Philebus* with the *Republic*'s epistemology.[116] And it is in the sixth and seventh chapters that Iamblichus explains his project precisely according to the terms from book 7 of the *Republic*: "But I think namely that the method of all these mathematics, if it arrives at the commonalities that they have with one another and their kinship, and demonstrates what they share with one another, leads our study to that which we seek so that our work would not be in vain."[117] If the study of mathematical principles does not lead to a common source, Iamblichus continues, we would be like prisoners bound in the cave unable to turn around toward the source of light. Plato never specified which Pythagoreans proposed that the commonalities of the mathematical sciences mean that they are kindred sciences, but Iamblichus unhesitatingly quotes a fragment from Archytas to show Plato's dependence.[118] This is why, Iamblichus reasons, Plato claimed in the *Epinomis* that each discipline was like a link in a single continuous chain.[119] It is therefore according to the logic of Plato's own dialogue that Iamblichus introduces Archytas to explain the common mathematical principles.

In the eighth chapter of the work Iamblichus analyzes the criterion (κριτήριον) for mathematical judgments and argues that discursive reasoning functions according to the differences (διαφορὰς) produced by reason's methods of division (ἀπο διαιρέσεως).[120] Iamblichus thereafter quotes two Doric Pythagorean pseudepigraphic texts. I have already mentioned Archytas, but the first text that he cites in chapter 8 is attributed to Brotinus's book *On the Intellect and Discursive Reasoning* (Περὶ νοῦ καὶ διανοίας). It provides an account of the mathematical analogy of the divided line made famous at *Republic* 509d7 (although the fragment does not mention it explicitly): "And on account of which Brotinus in his book *On the Intellect and Discursive Reason* dividing

them [the levels of knowledge] from one another says the following: 'Discursive reason is more (μεῖζόν) than the intellect, and the object of discursive reasoning is more than the intelligible. For the intellect is simple and not composite, and is the first thinking and the first thought (but this is the idea; for it is indivisible and not composite and first before the others), but discursive reasoning is manifold and divisible, and is the second thinking (for it has received science and reason); and proportionately the objects of discursive reasoning, which are the things known, demonstrated, and universal, are received from the intellect and through reason.'"[121] Brotinus's pseudepigraphon argues that the line is divided, or one could say limited, into unequal segments and that the larger portion of the line corresponds to discursive reasoning (διάνοια), whereas the smaller identifies the intellect (νόος). Analogously, according to the same ratio the larger segment also corresponds to the objects of discursive reasoning (διανοατά) and the smaller to the intelligible objects of thought (νοητά).

The second pseudepigraphon quoted by Iamblichus is one of Archytas's: "But Archytas in his *On the Intellect and Sense Perception* (Περὶ νοῦ καὶ αἰσθήσεως) distinguishes still more clearly the criteria of beings, and establishes the criterion (κριτήριον) corresponding to mathematics with the following: 'In our very selves, he says, with respect to our soul there are four kinds of knowledge, intellect, science, opinion, and sense perception, two of which are the origins of reasoning, namely, intellect and sense perception, but two are at the end, namely science and opinion. . . . For just like a line divided into two equal (ἴσα) segments, with each segment again divided according to the same ratio, thus also one divides the intelligible from the visible, and again one divides in this way each of these segments to differentiate one another with respect to clearness and obscurity.'"[122] This corroborates Brotinus's analogy of faculties of discursive reasoning and intellect with their matching objects, but it also unfolds the two lower analogous levels of belief (δόξα) and sense perception (αἴσθησις) and their corresponding metaphysical realities, namely, objects of perception and belief (αἰσθητά; δοξαστά), and likenesses or images (εἰκασία). However, Archytas's pseudepigraphon not only differs from Brotinus's by explicitly mentioning the divided line (γραμμὰν δίχα τετμαμένην) and postulating that the segments are divided in equal ratios, it also utilizes the same terminology of clarity and obscurity (σαφηνείᾳ τε καὶ ἀσαφείᾳ) from *Republic* 509d7. The two pseudepigrapha, in effect, establish the schema used by late ancient Neoplatonists for interpreting Plato's divided line but project it into the past as Pythagorean mathematical principles.

Proclus employs the pseudepigraphic Pythagorean reasons in his commentaries on Euclid's *Elements* and Plato's *Republic*. In his commentary on Euclid,

similarly to Iamblichus, Proclus states at the outset: "To find the principles of mathematical being as a whole, we must ascend to those all-pervading principles that generate everything from themselves: namely, the Limit and the Unlimited."[123] Proclus does not attribute these principles explicitly to Philolaus, as he does in his *Platonic Theology* and his commentary on the *Timaeus*, and likewise when a few paragraphs later he introduces the divided line as a response to the *Theaetetus*'s investigation into the criterion for knowledge he remains silent about his Pythagorean sources: "Next we should see what faculty it is that pronounces judgment in mathematics [τὸ κριτήριον τῶν μαθημάτων]. On this doctrine let us again follow the guidance of Plato. In the *Republic* he sets on one side the objects of knowledge and over against them the forms of knowing, and pairs the forms of knowing with the types of knowable things. Some things he posits as intelligibles (νοητὰ), others as perceptibles (αἰσθητὰ); and then he makes a further distinction among intelligibles between intelligibles and understandables (διανοητά), and among perceptibles between perceptibles and likenesses (εἰκαστά). To the intelligibles, the highest of the four classes, he assigns intellection (νόησιν) as its mode of knowing, to understandables understanding (διάνοια), to perceptibles belief (πίστις), and to likeness conjecture (εἰκασία)."[124] Mathematical objects, he reasons, are between what is without parts and divisions (the limit) and what is in every way divisible (the unlimited). In his commentary on the *Republic* Proclus similarly analyzes the divided line to introduce his discussion of the cave in the *Republic*.

> Since Plato wanted to demonstrate that the procession of beings from the One is continuous and united, he compared this continuity to a single line (γραμμῇ μιᾷ), the second segments of which always proceed, through resemblance (ὁμοιότητος) and mutual connection, from the first without any gaps separating the beings. For this gap was not permitted, since the Good produces all things and in turn converts them to it. In any case, the creation (production; γένεσιν) must resemble the creator. Since this last being is One it is necessary that its creation be continuous; for continuity is related to unity. The cause of this continuity is the resemblance of the latter segments to the former segments. But we agree altogether that this is due to the One, for resemblance is a kind of unity (ἑνότης). So because of this Plato conceives a single line and cuts it into two, cutting it not into equal parts but into unequal parts, which are nevertheless two.[125]

Proclus asks his readers to think of the segmentation of a single line into two unequal parts, and each segment further into two further unequal parts, in light of Plato's explanation of the principles of the One and the Dyad in the *Philebus*. The mathematical ratio according to which the line is cut, he writes, also ought to be understood according to what Plato says about analogy in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*, that is, Plato describes the mathematical analogy according to which the universe is made in the *Timaeus* as the "most beautiful" and writes in *Laws* that the "equal measure" of justice is "Zeus's judgment."[126] For Proclus, therefore, the mathematical nature of the divided line in the *Republic*'s account of knowledge itself is analogous to the mathematized nature of the universe: it reveals the criterion and measure of the cosmos.

If one compares the two pseudepigraphic texts from Brotinus and Archytas that were quoted above with these two passages on the divided line from Proclus's commentaries on the *Republic* and on Euclid's *Elements*, one sees that although Proclus prefers to follow Plato directly without identifying Pythagorean sources, his indebtedness to chapter 8 of Iamblichus's *De communi mathematica scientia* is perfectly clear.[127] In his analysis of the criterion for mathematical judgments, he presents the Iamblichean divisions of faculties and their corresponding realities in a manner and terminology similar to Iamblichus's pseudepigraphic sources.

There are two passages from works by Ficino that are relevant to the discussion of his debt to Iamblichus's *De communi mathematica scientia*.[128] The first, as one would expect, is a very brief statement in his *epitome* of the *Republic* on the divided line: "Plato follows (*sequitur*) the division of things into two *genera*, the visible and the invisible, both of which are again divided into two, namely, the antecedent and the subsequent, and he makes a similar division for human perception. In this regard he follows (*sequitur*) Bro[n]tinus and Archytas, but he explains it more elegantly and extensively."[129] In the second, from the *epitome* to the *Theaetetus*, Ficino (like Proclus in his commentary on Euclid's *Elements*) responds to the aporetic conclusion of the *Theaetetus,* namely, that the interlocutors are incapable of providing a definition of and criterion for knowledge, by explicating the schema of the divided line:

> Finally, once all of these have been refuted one ought to see what Plato teaches. In fact, in the sixth book of the *Republic* he imitates the Pythagoreans Bro[n]tinus and Archytas; he establishes two *genera* of things, namely, the intelligible and the sensible. The former is stable and incorporeal, the latter is changeable and corporeal. He calls the

> way to know the former "reason," and the way to the other "sense perception," and the common notion of the former "intelligence," and of the latter "opinion." But he also divides each genus into two segments. For he wishes the intelligible to be first and secondary; in the first the ideas (that is, the species and notions <*notiones*; Ficino 1576 = *motiones*> of the divine mind), other minds, and souls are contained, in the second numbers and figures. In fact, although numbers and figures are incorporeals, because they admit a certain division, they should not be judged of equal rank to the indivisible substances. The knowledge of the first he calls by the precise name "intellect," and of the second "intellection." He also divides the sensible in the same ratio, namely, into a first and a second. In the first he places all bodies and corporeals. In the second shadows and images of bodies, whether they are visible in water or in mirrors. Plato thinks that they relate to bodies as mathematics relate to the divine. He specifically names the perception of bodies "belief" and the shadow of bodies "imagination." Thereafter he denies that there is knowledge concerning bodies, their shadows, and mathematics; instead he locates it only in the intellect of divinities, which is what he meant in this dialogue in the beginning when he proposed that knowledge and wisdom are identical. For he always testifies that wisdom is the contemplation of the divine.[130]

Ficino ignores what many ancient and modern commentators find puzzling about the divided line, namely, whether the line is divided into equal or unequal segments, that is, whether the text ought to be read according to one of two variants: ἄνισα or ἂν ἴσα.[131] Following the Greek of his Florentine manuscript (ἂν ἴσα), he translates the passage to render it as two equal segments (*duas equales sectam*).[132] This is at first glance somewhat odd, since Iamblichus's *De communi mathematica scientia* is perhaps the most important source that identifies the alternative readings of the text; the unequal division of the line is attributed to Brotinus, and the equal division of the line to Archytas. Iamblichus in effect synthesizes both options, however, to present conclusions that are remarkably similar to Ficino's (and Proclus's), namely, that the line remains one and the same because the analogy between the segments should be understood as an emanation of likeness (ὁμοιότητος): "After this he cuts the line into pieces, which in truth is one line (γραμμὴν . . . μίαν), so that he may understand comprehension (τὸ γνωριστικὸν) as one, and divides it into two according to the first differences of beings and the divisions distinguishing the two segments. But he establishes

these equal differences and divisions according to their participation with ratios and ideas, and through the resemblance (ὁμοιότητα) of the participants to the participated, and for this reason there is in a certain way the same analogy in both. And again he divides each of the segments according to the same ratio."[133] Ficino's reading of the divided line agrees with Iamblichus's conclusion that the line, although divided, remains one. Ficino formulates the divided line as an emanation flowing out from the divine, connecting us with it: "Therefore knowledge is by means of a certain reason the comprehension of divine things (*comprehensio*; Iamblichus's τὸ γνωριστικὸν), residing in the intellect and emanating into reason, having been inserted into the intellect by God, and having been turned toward reason by a dialectical instructor inspired by God, reorienting reason to the intellect, and uniting the Intellect with divinity."[134] In his exposition of the divided line Ficino presents Plato as a follower of a Pythagorean understanding (which modern scholarship would characterize as Neoplatonic) of the cyclical process in the triad of remaining (μονή), proceeding (πρόοδος), and return (ἐπιστροφή).

Ficino is also attentive to the fact that the divided line is attributed to Pythagorean personae. He consistently uses the same terminology in the passages quoted above to interpret the *Timaeus*, the *Republic*, and the *Theaetetus*, that is, that Plato follows (*sequitur*) or imitates (*imitatur*) the Pythagoreans but is more eloquent in the process (*elegantius*)—by which perhaps Ficino means that Plato's Attic prose is more elegant than the archaizing Doric pseudepigrapha. This is in perfect harmony with his prosopopoeic exegesis of the Platonic corpus into Pythagorean, Socratic, and Platonic personae. In utilizing these fragments, Ficino's goal, like Iamblichus's, is to present a unitary source for Platonism, before Plato, in Pythagorean philosophy. At times blurring the distinctions between precise Socratic and Pythagorean personae, Ficino thinks Plato makes Socrates speak on occasion in a Pythagorean register. In fact, as I mentioned above, Ficino not only believes that Plato had Pythagorean writings and masters, he also claims that Socrates had Pythagorean teachers.

Archytas of Tarentum is one of the most famous ancient thinkers and mathematicians designated as Pythagorean. Known to the Renaissance through a number of ancient sources (both Greek and Latin), including biographies in the *Suda* and Diogenes Laertius, Archytas would have come to prominence for Ficino through Plato's *Letters*, not least for supposedly saving Plato from Dionysus II, the tyrant of Syracuse.[135] Plato may have been referring to Archytas's theories in *Republic* 530d but does not mention him by name. Nor does Plato ever refer to him as a Pythagorean. Commenting on the *Seventh Letter*, in which

Archytas is named and which Ficino accepts as authentic, Ficino makes it clear that Plato learned from the Pythagoreans during his voyages that the divine may be grasped by the intellect but that such an understanding could not be expressed in writing or speech, since this truth is not conceived by way of discursive reasoning.[136] Here the esoteric dimension of Plato's philosophy is presented as a Pythagorean understanding that the highest objects of intellect (νοητὰ) are themselves ineffable and cannot be understood singularly by our discursive reasoning.

Carl Huffman has recently cast light on the "shadow of Plato," or rather the Platonic tradition, in which Archytas stood, in order to study the mathematician directly and independently of later transformations. His research tries to narrow down the field of Archytas's authentic writings to a very small number: four fragments, to be precise.[137] Yet even here Luc Brisson has expressed very strong doubts. He reminds us that Archytas, the preeminent pseudonymous author of Pythagorean pseudepigrapha, was only considered Pythagorean after Aristoxenus designated him as such.[138] The question of authentic Pythagoreanism is problematic for the Renaissance, especially since many of these largely fragmentary sources were just being rediscovered in Greek manuscripts. For the intellectual historian of Renaissance philosophy, it might be interesting to see how certain forms of "authentic" Pythagoreanism survive through the ages, but this in no way diminishes the philosophical value that Renaissance authors found in what we now consider pseudepigraphic Pythagoreanism. Ficino, it is clear by now, is one of the foremost students of these texts. Even if he Platonized the Pythagoreans—a tradition that goes as far back as the Old Academy—in reality he thought that the Platonic texts were often filled with Pythagorean concepts, but in his mind this did not prevent them from being fertile ground for thinking.

The identity of the second Pythagorean in question, Brotinus, is more obscure to us moderns. Ficino and his contemporaries, who utilized his pseudepigrapha fruitfully, knew the few fragments that we now possess of him.[139] For instance, the interlocutors in *Rithmomachia* by Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples (c. 1455–1536) are the Pythagoreans Alcmeon, Bathillus, and Brotinus.[140] Giorgio Valla (1447–1500) cites the pseudepigrapha of Archytas and Brotinus, as does Ficino's own disciple Francesco Cattani da Diacceto, to argue for the possibility of a mathesis universalis and interpret the divided line.[141] Since they did not hesitate to refer to the little known Brotinus, it is easy to imagine how much more prominent a place they gave to the famous Archytas and Philolaus. Two separate pieces of evidence also seem to indicate that Renaissance humanists had access to Greek manuscripts of Iamblichus's work besides those

that have survived: the lending records of the Biblioteca Marciana from 1553 record that Sebastiano Erizzo (1525–85) borrowed a volume that contained the *De secta Pythagorica*, apparently along with a now lost commentary on the work by Simplicius; Raffaello Maffei (1451–1522) mentions the existence of a similar manuscript in 1506 in the Vatican Library.[142] A number of other humanists and philosophers, such as Bessarion, were familiar with Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*, and it seems that others also knew Ficino's version of the work: Giovanni Pico, his erudite nephew Gianfrancesco Pico, Pierleone Leoni, Poliziano, Elia del Medigo, Francesco Cattani da Diacceto, Leon Battista Alberti, and Giovanni Nesi. Nicolaus Scutellius (1490–1542) probably at least knew of it, and later Lucas Holstenius (1596–1661) owned a copy of it.

Brotinus's fortune reached far from his origins in Metapontum, where he was purportedly a contemporary and disciple of Pythagoras himself. Diogenes Laertius, the *Suda*, and Iamblichus disagree as to whether he was the husband or the father of the famous Pythagorean philosopher Theano, who had an equally murky relationship with Pythagoras and whose pseudonymous fragments also survive. Readers of the commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* by Alexander of Aphrodisias (second century CE) would have learned that Plato followed Brotinus in stating that the Good and the One are beyond being.[143] Similarly, readers of Proclus's teacher Syrianus's commentary on the *Metaphysics* would know that Brotinus declares that the supersubstantial principles of reality "[surpass] all intellect and substance in power and dignity," which is a quotation from *Republic* 509b that is voiced in the persona of Brotinus, and that "taking his start from these, the divine Plato also, in the *Letters*, in the *Republic*, and the *Parmenides*, utters the same sentiments on the topic"; and again that "the One and the Good is superessential (ὑπερούσιον) for Plato, for Brotinus the Pythagorean, and, in a word, for all of those who have come from the school of the Pythagoreans."[144] That is, even before Iamblichus, in the writings of Alexander of Aphrodisias and later in Syrianus, we find an account of Brotinus that agrees with the *De communi mathematica scientia* and states that the henological doctrine of Plato, central to Neoplatonic thought, of an ineffable One above being, has a unitary source in Pythagoras's immediate disciple, Brotinus. Given that Syrianus and Alexander of Aphrodisias quote Brotinus in order to interpret Aristotle's *Metaphyiscs* 1091, there are perhaps good reasons to believe that they are working from a common source.

What may seem like an idiosyncratic Ficinian interpretation of Plato's divided line turns out to be much more common than one might think in Renaissance and premodern understandings of Platonism. Other important

Iamblichean sources available in the Renaissance for the origins of the divided line in the pseudepigraphic works of Brotinus and Archytas are the manuscripts of Plato themselves. Although it is not present in the two principal Plato manuscripts used by Ficino, there is a long marginal scholion explaining the divided line, which abridges Iamblichus's *De communi mathematica scientia* and debates the two Greek variants indicating that the line is divided into two either equal (ἴσα) or unequal (ἄνισα) segments.[145] So far I have not been able to identify any manuscript including the scholion that I can prove Ficino used.[146] In any case, he could have made the argument for expressing the divided line in the personae of Brotinus and Archytas solely on the basis of his studies of Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica* without having recourse to the scholion. Nonetheless, the hypothesis of another, still unknown, manuscript of Plato's *Republic* that would have placed the Iamblichean scholion immediately before Ficino's eyes while he read the *Republic* is worth pursuing. Earlier in this chapter I showed how Ficino drew on a scholion to identify the so-called Italian or Sicilian in the *Gorgias* as Empedocles, and in the following chapter I demonstrate that he finds important reasons for identifying where Plato speaks in his own voice from the introductory manuscript scholion to Plato's *Laws*, so I think it plausible that he could likewise have drawn on a scholiast's marginalia to the *Republic* for a passage where he believes Plato is speaking in a Pythagorean persona.

I wish to turn once more to Ficino's own notes to the manuscript I analyzed above to study Ficino and Philolaus (i.e., MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 70), which contains marginalia edited by Saffrey. One of the most essential and largest parts of this manuscript's four-folio treatise, *Proprietas vocabulorum Platonicorum*, is an exposition of the philosophical terminology drawn from Plato's divided line (Figure 10).[147] In these long notes, Ficino presents the epistemological categories of the divided line alongside Proclus's metaphysical explanation in proposition 55 and its corollary from the *Elements of Theology*. There Proclus distinguishes between two kinds of perpetuity: one that is eternal and another that is through time; and further between two kinds of things that exist in time: some that have perpetual duration, others that come-to-be in time. Similarly to his explanation of the divided line, Proclus demonstrates that these temporal categories form a unitary series, and that things that come-to-be in time can only be connected to what is eternal by means of an intermediary likeness (ὁμοιότητός) proceeding from the first segment in the series through lower secondary segments.[148] His notes show how Ficino understands the epistemological categories of the divided line according to metaphysics of time: "νόυς: the intellect pertains to the eternal and the intelligibles; διάνοια: discursive

thinking on mathematical intermediaries between eternity and time; δόξα and αἴσθησις: opinion and sensation on all natural and temporal things."[149] It is clear, if it was not already, that Ficino understands the divided line as a continuous emanation from the One. After schematizing Proclus's distinction between two kinds of perpetuity, he continues: "There are therefore four cognitive faculties in the soul, according to Plato and Proclus, as Iamblichus shows; on the one hand there are the two first, pertaining to the intelligible, and on the other the two secondary ones, pertaining to the sensible."[150] About the long section on the divided line Saffrey says, "It is true that this doctrine is the common property of all of Platonism, and Ficino would have found it, or found it again, in Proclus as well as in Plato himself. . . . Ficino gives us his source by referring to Iamblichus, but unfortunately I have not been able to identify this passage."[151] At the very least, the present chapter has identified Saffrey's missing source. Given Saffrey's dating of the annotations, moreover, it demonstrates Ficino's use of Iamblichus's understanding of the divided line to gloss Plato and Proclus before 1463, that is, before he undertook the task of translating the *Republic*, and it agrees with my conclusion in Chapter 2 that Ficino studied (and worked at translating) Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica* before he finished (or at the very least while he was in the process of) translating the first ten Platonic dialogues that he presented to Cosimo de' Medici in 1464.[152] These notes further demonstrate that Ficino tried to integrate what he took to be Philolaus's mathematical principles (limit and unlimited) in the *Philebus* with Archytas's and Brotinus's mathematical criteria (the limited segments of the divided line) from the *Republic*.

Ficino often simply refers to Pythagoreans in a way analogous to Aristotle's references to "Pythagoreans" or "so-called Pythagoreans." There are also possible instances where Ficino attributes specific doctrines of later Pythagoreans or Pythagorean pseudepigrapha to Pythagoras himself. By determining which books Ficino had on his desk, so to speak, while interpreting Plato, one can also identify which Pythagorean writings he believed Plato had at hand while composing his own dialogues. Thus, for Ficino, Timaeus of Locri, Philolaus, Brotinus, and Archytas were to Plato what Aglaophamus was to Pythagoras, namely, intermediary spokespersons. For Ficino the false dating of the pseudepigrapha established early written continuities with oral philosophical and religious traditions. Brotinus may have played a double role in transmitting Pythagorean formulations not only of a mathesis universalis but also of a *religio universalis*, insofar as he also served as a direct intermediary for Orphism, since we know from a passage in the *Suda* and from Clement of Alexandria that the ancients identified him as the author of the Orphic *Hymn to Nature* that was frequently

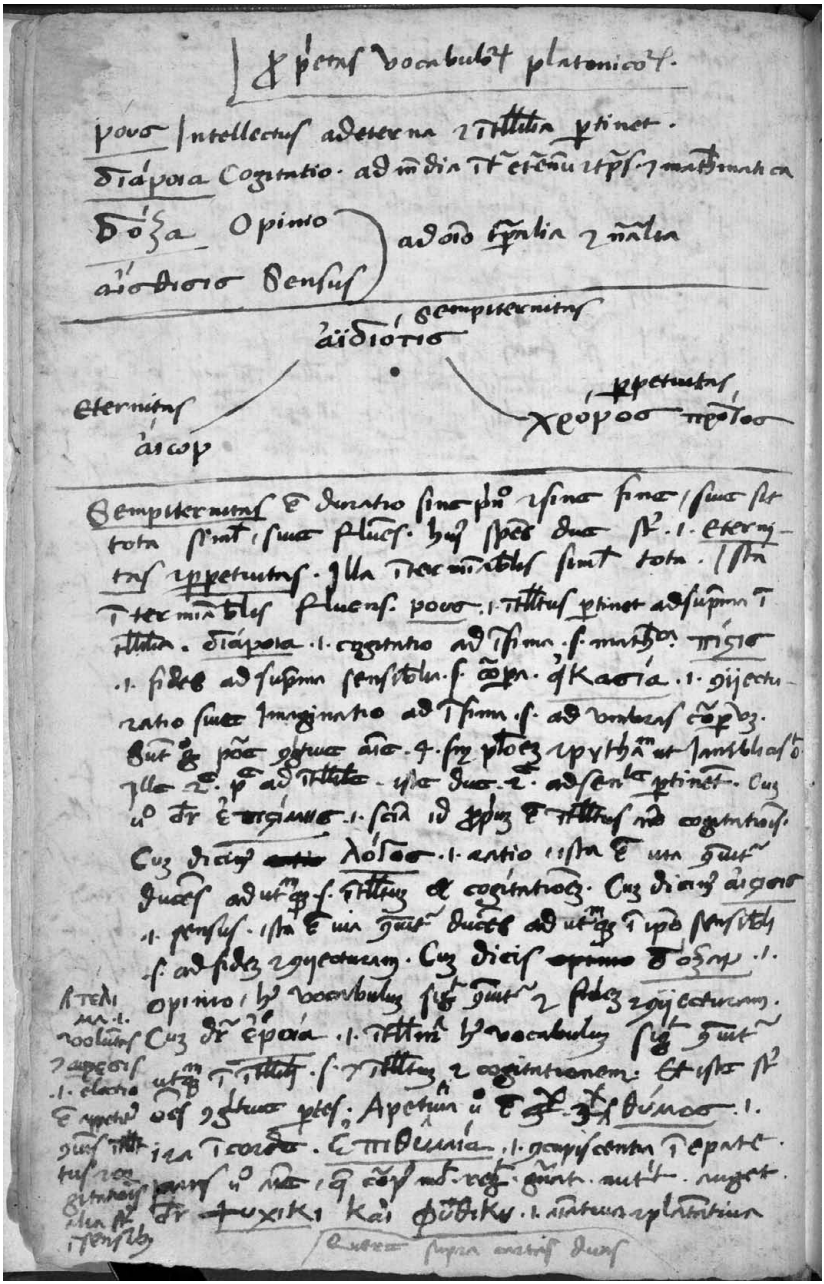

FIGURE 10. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 70, f. 3v. For the transcription see Saffrey 1959: 84–85.

and fondly quoted by Ficino to characterize nature's silent (ἄψοφος) emanation. Ficino never mentions the attribution of authorship of the Orphic *Hymn to Nature* to Brotinus, but it is very likely that he would have known of it, since the passage in the *Suda* is excerpted and transcribed in a manuscript in the hand of Poliziano, his personal friend and sometimes intellectual rival.[153]

Burkert has argued that one can find in Aristotle evidence for authentic Pythagoreanism, specifically before it was co-opted by the Platonic Academy, which shows that the Pythagoreans did not espouse the Platonic χωρισμός, that is, the separation between the intelligible and the sensible, between being and becoming, that is famously illustrated by the divided line.[154] This division of reality into a "Platonic" dualism is Burkert's yardstick to distinguish between authentic Pythagoreanism and Platonized Pythagoreanism. However, the Neoplatonic interpretation of the divided line emphatically underscores the emanative unity through all divided segments, from the ineffable superessential One through nature's images and shadows. There is no absolute dualism. The line, although precisely divided, remains unified. To borrow from the Pseudo-Pythagoreans, it is a mixture of limit and unlimited. Ficino, following Iamblichus, therefore retrojects one of the most central teachings of Neoplatonism, emanation, onto a Pythagorean source before Plato. Iamblichus and Ficino's understanding of Pythagoreanism is therefore, oddly enough, in agreement with this particular point of Aristotle's that, to abridge the argument from 1091b of the *Metaphysics*, the Pythagoreans postulate the One as the highest and most self-sufficient principle of unity as well as a principle of number and an element of nature, as the ancient poets have it.[155]

There is an analogy in Ficino's thinking between chronological priority and metaphysical priority. Just as his divided line remains a single unit, so the divisions in Ficino's progressive unfolding of the prisca theologia remain continuous and unitary. Each seeks a divine source. In the end, there is also an ethical dimension to Ficino's Pythagoreanizing of Plato's metaphysical principles. If for Ficino multiplicity is derived from the One via the procession of the principles of the limit and unlimited and the five great kinds, the way in which we become like those ancient divine sages is to return back up the epistemological ladder of intermediary likenesses (ὁμοιότης) of the divided line. As he explains in his commentary on the *Timaeus*, through the mediating role of mathematics one can assimilate to the divine. Ficino's concluding remarks on the *Timaeus* in the public lectures that I mentioned above address the role of mathematics and dialectics in the education of the philosopher in these terms: "And if someone is gifted with philosophy, from it he will become like God, and

he will become on earth as God is in heaven; indeed, the philosopher is an intermediary between God and men, to God he is a man, but to men he is a God."[156] In a recent book David Albertson has argued that Augustine's rejection of Pythagorean number was largely responsible for the suppression of mathematical theology in the Latin West.[157] It would seem that Ficino attempted to revive it. Analogously, in the following chapter I explain how Ficino reacts to Augustine's suppression of the Platonic logos by seeking a reconciliation between the Platonic corpus and Christianity's ultimate measure for the divinization of man: the transfiguration and incarnation of Christ.

CHAPTER 5

Plato

> And wishing to show me first how "you resist the proud and give grace to the humble," and with such great mercy you have shown the way of humility to men because your "word was made flesh and dwelt" among men, you procured for me through a certain man swollen with the most inhuman pride certain books of the Platonists translated from Greek into Latin. And there I read not indeed these words but this very same thing, which was exhorted with a number of different reasons, that "in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and God was the word . . . but I did not read there that "the word was made into flesh and dwelt among us."
>
> —Augustine, *Confessions*

Laws: The Incarnation and the Athenian Stranger as *Persona Platonis*

Book 7.9 of Augustine's *Confessions* contains a well-known comparison between the Gospel of John and the "books of the Platonists." Situated in the middle of the *Confessions*, the passage functions as a pivot in Augustine's conversion, indicating the Platonic turn away from his past life toward a new Christian one. Yet Augustine's message in chapter 9 is that although the *Platonicorum libri* serve as an initial protreptic reorientation, they do not enable us to reach the intended fatherland. Quoting not the Platonists themselves but John's "in principio erat verbum," Augustine tells us that in these works he read ("ibi legi") the reasons found in the opening of John's Gospel. His prosopopoeic rhetorical device in effect establishes the comparison between the Johannine logos and the Platonic

logos by expressing the Scriptures *ex Platonicorum persona*.[1] Nevertheless, the similarities end with the Incarnation. Its absence is noted in the rhetorical comparison by Augustine's reduplicative use of "non ibi legi" (7.9.13, 14), the similar "non habent illi libri" and "non est ibi," as well as the statement that the Platonists lack humility, since they are deaf ("non audiunt," 7.9.14) to Christ's teachings—all of which strongly emphasize the essential doctrinal difference that the *Platonicorum libri* do not mention the Incarnation.

Confessions 7.9 has long been studied and debated by eminent scholars seeking to measure the debt that the theology of Augustine owed to Neoplatonism, to study the place of his Platonic readings in his conversion, and to identify the exact books included among the *Platonicorum libri*.[2] The Platonic preoccupations inherited by modern scholars and theologians from the church fathers are also crucial for Marsilio Ficino. Ficino addresses the question of Augustine's *Platonicorum libri* directly in a letter of 1494 to Jacopo Rondoni, bishop of Rimini, in which he expresses the opinion that many Platonists who lived after Christ adopted Trinitarian formulations from the Gospel of John: "For this reason, Aurelius Augustine, formerly a Platonist and now deliberating about his profession of the Christian faith, says that when he encountered our books of the Platonists and identified Christian dogmas sanctioned by them through imitation, he gave thanks to God and was at once restored, better disposed to accept Christian dogmas."[3] Ficino clarifies his statement with care, differentiating the books of the Platonists from Plato's corpus of dialogues: "I therefore assert beyond dispute that the secret of the Christian Trinity is never in the books of Plato himself, but a few things are indeed somehow similar in words, though not in sense."[4] Discussing the books of Plato and the Platonists, and Augustine's reading of them, Ficino tells his correspondent that the Platonists imitate Christian ideas and that while a few of Plato's Trinitarian expressions resemble Christianity, they are not identical. If, however, Ficino's dogmatic orthodoxy remains safely protected in this explanation to Bishop Rondoni, one finds that matters are not always so clear.

In this chapter I propose to consider how Ficino reads Christianity in Plato's corpus. First and foremost, in translating Plato's *Laws* he wrestles with the philological and exegetical possibilities of unearthing "a few things . . . somehow similar in words" to the most profound of all Christian doctrines, the Incarnation, from Plato's speech in his own persona. Manuscript and textual evidence shows that Ficino's discovery of the Incarnation in the Greek variants of the scholia to the Platonic corpus is far from conjectural guesswork; indeed, it remains one of his strongest attempts at a rapprochement between Christianity and Platonism.[5] If Augustine's *Platonicorum libri*—works by philosophers who lived after the advent of Christ—do not contain the Incarnation, then its dis-

covery in Plato's works, Ficino judges, transforms the Platonic corpus into a sacred text of sorts. Having identified the Incarnation in the *Laws*, Ficino then finds confirmation of his Christological exegesis in the *Epinomis* and in Plato's *Letters*, where he thinks Plato begins to sound like later Platonists in articulating a metaphysical trinity.

For Ficino, the identification of the dogma of the Incarnation—the *via* of Christ—in the Platonic corpus is closely tied to his search for a way out of the aporetic impasse of the perennial Platonic question: Among all the interlocutors in the dialogues, behind which mask does Plato's face appear? In order for Ficino to locate Christian dogmas in Plato's teachings, he must first explain how and when (if at all) Plato offers his own explicit doctrines in the dialogues.

How one answers this Platonic question may determine whether one interprets the Platonic corpus as aporetic or dogmatic. Plato mentions his own name only twice in the dialogues and never as the voice of the author or as a speaking character.[6] The problem is underscored by Socrates' ironic refusal to put forward his own positive doctrines but willingness to convey those of others (for instance, negatively as Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* and positively as Diotima in the *Symposium*). For Ficino, the role of Socrates as a mythmaker is one of the strongests indications of how he adopts a dogmatic persona speaking in *more Pythagoricorum*. Socrates stands out because it is often taken for granted that he is Plato's mouthpiece; yet not all attentive readers of the dialogues have thought this so obvious. For instance, there are two dialogues, the *Laws* and the *Epinomis* (if the latter is accepted as a genuine work of Plato), where Socrates is not even an interlocutor.

The Athenian Stranger from the *Laws*, however, establishes the parameters for the aporetic understanding of the dramatic personae of the dialogues. If Socrates can be considered one pole of the Platonic question, the Athenian Stranger can be seen as the other, since Diogenes Laertius tells us that some commentators erroneously equate the anonymous Stranger with Plato himself.[7] Who, then, *is* the anonymous Stranger? Identified only as ξένος—being in Crete and outside his polis—he is without a name. Unlike Homeric guests who eventually reveal their identity to their hosts, the anonymous Stranger never divulges himself. If all speeches must belong to specific persons, as Quintilian says, and if all speeches have fathers, as Plato says at the end of the *Phaedrus*, then to which character mask (*persona* or πρόσωπον) do the speeches of the anonymous Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* belong? Ficino's answer is deceptively simple: Plato himself. The identification of Plato's πρόσωπον, Ficino reasons, will reveal Plato's doctrines. On what grounds does he make this identification?

Ficino lists three works where Plato speaks in his own voice: the *Letters*, which, as such, are not supposed to have been written in a dramatic manner; the

Laws; and the *Epinomis*, a companion to the *Laws*.[8] The *Laws*, divided into twelve lengthy books, has long been considered Plato's final composition. Its dramatic setting is the island of Crete, where three old men, Clinias the Cretan, Megillus the Spartan, and the Athenian Stranger converse during their walk from the city of Cnossus to Zeus's temple and grotto on Mount Ida, where they are headed in order to consult the god about establishing laws for a new Cretan colony. The dialogic and dramatic elements of the work are somewhat limited when compared to other Platonic dialogues, and the lion's share of the discourse is given to the Athenian Stranger, who expatiates in quasi-monologues on various philosophical topics as well as actual laws. Ficino gives a privileged position to the *Laws* by placing it last (with the *Epinomis* and the *Letters*) in his ordering of the dialogues—a position which is also attested in Thrasyllus's tetralogies, but whose organizational schema Ficino does not otherwise follow.[9]

Ficino begins his commentary, or *epitome*, on Plato's *Laws* by dividing philosophy into the contemplative approach of the Pythagoreans, the moral and active philosophy of Socrates, and the combination of both, which is the philosophy of Plato: "To what end is all this? So that we remember that since the arrangement of the present *Laws* is told to us by Plato himself—neither through a Pythagorean *persona* nor through Socrates, as is often the case with other matters, but, on the contrary, through the very *persona* of Plato himself—we justifiably obtain a middle way (*via*) between divine and human things, so that we are neither dragged through certain hidden or impassable ways (*invia*), nor still pulled down to the realms below to more remote things. On account of this, the ten books of the *Republic* are judged to be more Pythagorean and Socratic, whereas the present *Laws* are more Platonic."[10] Ficino forges a particular path in his prosopopoeic interpretation by presenting his readers with a middle way between dogmatic Pythagorean and aporetic Socratic philosophy. He thus situates Platonic serioludere between serious dogmas and Socratic play.[11] It is not only Socratic philosophy that conveys verisimilitude for Ficino but also the Pythagoreans, in that their exoteric works do not fully express their esoteric doctrines. Timaeus's comments to Socrates that his discourse on the gods and the cosmos will be verisimilar (*Ti.* 29c–d) illustrate this last point well. Moreover, in saying that Plato presents a middle way between the two, Ficino uses a philosophical etymology, since the fundamental meaning of *aporia* (ἀπορία) is an impassable way or *invia*, as Ficino says: that is, the absence of a *via*, or πόρος. Indeed, arguing that he is going to avoid impassable and hidden ways, Ficino seeks a hermeneutically clear path into the Platonic corpus. In this interpretive middle way, he identifies the Athenian Stranger as Plato's own persona and thus argues that one can find his explicit dogmas in the *Laws* and their conclusion, the *Epinomis*.

No Neoplatonist explicitly identifies the Athenian Stranger as Plato. There are passages in which Neoplatonic commentators quote the "Athenian Stranger," and there are other moments when they say something like "as Plato says . . ." and then quote a passage from the Athenian Stranger. In the latter instances, however, they are never addressing the Platonic question or the prosopopoeic nature of the dialogues but merely quoting a passage from the work.[12] The *Laws*, left out of the canon of dialogues to be studied as set down by Iamblichus, does not apparently figure prominently in the Neoplatonic educational curriculum. The *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (unknown to Ficino) relates that Proclus also casts out the *Laws* (along with the *Republic*) from the educational canon. Proclus's judgment on the *Epinomis* is even more severe, since he considered it to be spurious.[13] In his commentary on the *Republic* (first known to Ficino only in 1492), Proclus describes the skopos, or aim, of the *Laws* in relation to the *Republic* as follows: "Therefore, through all this it is clear that the aim of the *Republic* is nothing other than guidance on the best polity, just as the aim of the *Laws* is guidance on the laws."[14] This is not to say that the Neoplatonists ignore the *Laws* and other writings of political philosophy; the work of Dominic O'Meara has punctured that scholarly assumption.[15]

Moreover, readers of Proclus's *Platonic Theology*, which Ficino studied very early in his Platonic vocation, know that he focuses on the *Laws* in order to understand how Plato expresses the fundamental theological dogmas "that there are gods, that they have providence over everything, that they do everything according to justice, and that none of their inferiors turns them away from this." In fact, one of Ficino's surviving notebooks includes (between a short quotation from the *Epinomis* and selections from Proclus's *Elements of Theology*) Ficino's nearly complete transcription of Proclus's proof for the existence of the gods in his *Platonic Theology*'s explanation of the *Laws*. This demonstration from the principle of motion is the only passage that Ficino transcribes from the *Platonic Theology* in this manuscript and is largely based on a passage in the *Laws* that Proclus quotes and attributes to the Athenian Stranger. As Proclus explains: "It is quite clear to everyone that, among all the dogmas in theology, these are the preeminent principles."[16]

Nevertheless, the identification of the Athenian Stranger is a persistent problem in Platonic interpretation that has vexed ancient as well as modern interpreters.[17] Plato's first interpreter, Aristotle, mentions that the Stranger is Socrates.[18] Cicero takes the identification with Plato for granted, commenting briefly, without grounds or arguments, that Plato spoke with Clinias and Megillus (the two other interlocutors of the *Laws*). As in the case of the Neoplatonists,

however, neither Aristotle nor Cicero addresses the dialogic problem of interpreting Plato.[19] Diogenes Laertius says that previous interpreters equated the Athenian Stranger with Plato, but the interpreters themselves remain anonymous, since he neither quotes nor names them. What information we have on the interpretation and identification of the Anonymous Stranger in antiquity—from Cicero, Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius, and Stobaeus—is sparse, fragmentary, and seldom explicit.[20]

There are two other noteworthy cases, however, where the identities of the interlocutors in the *Laws* are discussed. The first is Basil of Caesarea (c. 330–79 CE), who, in his letter 135, uses prosopopoeia to interpret the Platonic dialogues and mentions its application to the *Laws*. He tells us: "But where he [Plato] introduces uncertain characters (πρόσωπα) into the dialogues, they are given the conversational role of settling matters; but he does not develop anything else from the characters (πρόσωπα) in his thinking—as, for example, he writes in the *Laws*."[21] Basil explains that Plato forgoes rhetorical adornments and introduces uncertain or indefinite interlocutors (ἀόριστα πρόσωπα) when getting to the heart of the matter. His reference to the *Laws* presumably points to the Athenian Stranger, who lacks character traits beyond his country of origin. Although Basil's exegetical strategy attributes clear argumentative positions to the *Laws*, he does not explicitly identify the Athenian Stranger with the persona of Plato. The safest and most satisfactory way of interpreting this passage is to read it as following Basil's description of Plato's ability to write in various stylistic registers, and his characterization of the lack of rhetorical figures and character development in the *Laws* as examples of simplicity, brevity, and clarity in speech and argumentation—stylistic traits that, as he also tells us in the letter, are appropriate to Christians. The second case is Oxyrhynchus Papyrus no. 3219, where the Athenian Stranger is briefly named as Plato.[22] It is obvious, however, that Ficino does not know the papyrus fragment; and it seems unlikely that he is making use of the passage from Basil.

Nevertheless, Ficino's explicit identification of the Athenian Stranger as Plato in his *epitome* on the *Laws* is not merely his own speculation. He is drawing on an anonymous introductory ὑπόθεσις, or scholion, to Plato's *Laws* included in his Greek manuscript of Plato's dialogues.[23] The scholion makes the identification based on the claim that the Athenian Stranger discusses two republics, which supposedly correspond to two dialogues: the *Laws* and the *Republic*.[24] The evidence of Ficino's use of the scholion is apparent and obvious. As can be seen in his *epitome*, however, Ficino is translating from it not verbatim but rather *ad sensum*, at times paraphrasing, at times removing or adding material (see Table 3). What, then, are the explicit dogmas proposed by the Athenian Stranger, or Plato, in the *Laws*?

Table 3. Comparison of the scholion to the beginning of the *Laws* in Ficino's manuscript of the Platonic dialogues with three passages from his *epitome* of Plato's *Laws*

Anonymous scholion in MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09, f. 289v, quoted Greene (ed.) 1938	Ficino, *In dialogum primum De legibus*
ὁ Ἀθηναῖος οὗτος ξένος πεποίηται ἐνταῦθα εἰς τὴν Κρήτην ἀπιών, ἔστι δὲ Πλάτων, ὡς ἐκ τοῦδε φανερόν. αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ Ἀθηναῖος ξένος ἐν τῷ. . . . τῶν Νόμων λέγει ὅτι ἤδη αὐτῷ δύο πολιτεῖα προηνύσθησαν. . .	Quod autem personam hic Platonis sub ipso Atheniensis hospitis nomine, et id quidem modestiae gratia lateat, legenti deinceps ex multis perspicue apparabit, ex eo praecipue, quod affirmabit se geminas tractavisse respublicas. —Ficino 1576: 2: 1488
ἢ οὖν οὐδ'ἐκεῖναι Πλάτωνος, ἢ εἰ μὴ τοῦτο, ὁ αὐτὸς ἂν εἴη τῷ Ἀθηναίῳ ξένῳ. οὗτος οὖν εἰς Κρήτην ἀφικόμενος καὶ περιτυγχάνων ἔξω πρὸ τῆς Κνωσσῶ Κλεινίᾳ τε τῷ Κρητὶ καὶ Μεγίλλῳ τῷ Λακεδαιμονίῳ, ἐπιτετραμμένοις μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν τὴν Κνωσσὸν οἰκούντων ἀποικίαν ποιήσασθαι ἐκεῖθεν καὶ καταστήσασθαι πόλιν νόμους τὲ προσήκοντας τοῖς πολίταις διαθεῖναι, προσεχῶς δ'ὡρμημένοις ἐπὶ τὸ τοῦ Διὸς ἄντρον, ἱερὸν τοῦτο γενόμενον ἀγιώτατον, ἐν ᾧ τὰ σεπτότατα καὶ ἀρρητότατα τῶν μυστηρίων ἐπετελεῖτο· περιτυχὼς δ'οὖν αὐτοῖς ὁ ξένος, καὶ ταῦτα παρ'αὐτῶν ÷ πυθόμενος, [*] ἤρετο ἐπὶ τούτοις τίνες ἂν εἶεν οἱ νόμοι· τῶν δὲ μὴ δυνηθέντων τελείαν ἀποδοῦναι τὴν τῶν νόμων διάθεσιν, ὁρώντων δὲ τὸ ξένον εὖ παρεσκευσμένον περὶ νόμων θέσιν, καὶ παρακαλούντων συλλήπτορα αὐτὸν γενέσθαι τῆς πολιτείας, ἄρχεται ὁ Ἀθηναῖος ξένος τῆς τῶν νόμων διαθέσεως. . .	Atheniensis hospes, id est, Plato profectus in Cretam prope Cnosum offendit Megillum Lacedaemonium, et Cliniam Cretensem, quem una cum novem aliis Cnosii accersiverant, ut coloniam inde deducerent, urbem conderent, eique leges darent. Hi ergo duo ad sacrum Iovis antrum consulturi de hoc accedebant: his factus obvius Atheniensis hospes, quidnam acturi irent interrogavit. Illi leges excogitaturos esse se responderunt. Verum cum multa de legibus interrogati ab hospite, quaestionem haud satis absolverent, et hospes illis ad leges aptissimus videretur, obsecraverunt eum, ut ad civitatem legibus instituendam una cum ipsis adiutor accederet. —Ibid.: 2: 1489
ἐν οἷς δὴ οὐκέτι, ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖς τῆς μεγάλης Πολιτείας, κοινὰ πάντα προστάττει, ἀλλ'ἑκάστῳ ἀργὸν ἀπονέμει καὶ πρὸς τούτῳ οἰκίαν, ἔτι μέντοι καὶ γυναῖκα ἰδίαν καὶ παῖδας οὐκέτι κοινούς, πλὴν ὅτι οὐδὲ ταῦτα ἀόριστα ἀφῆκεν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς κλήρους εἰς ὡρισμένον ἀριθμὸν περιέλαβεν. τεσσαράκοντα γὰρ καὶ πέντε τοὺς πάντα κλήρους διανέμειν παρακελεύεται· τὴν δ'αἰτίαν τοῦ τοσούτου ἀριθμοῦ γνωσόμεθα, ὅταν αὐτὸς ἐπιμνησθῇ	Hic ergo non coget homines, si noluerint [voluerint sic. cod.] inter se facere cuncta communia, permittet ut fieri solet, propria singulos possidere. Neque tamen cautis- simus auriga noster omnino laxabit habenas. Nam praeter summam aliarum diligentiam legum, prudentissime sanciet, ne cui liceat ultra certum, et illum quidem mediocrem terminum census amplificare, ne aliis quidem copia, nimia, aliis obsit inopia, neque cogantur, id quod miserabile esse putat, multi inter patriae suae ulnas esse mendici. —Ibid.: 2: 1488.
[*] Ὑπόθεσις] ÷ rasura habet A: continuat O αὐτῶν πυθόμενος. —*Scholia Platonica*, 296	

In his letter to Braccio Martelli, entitled *Concordia Mosis et Platonis*, Ficino underscores his prosopopoeic understanding of Plato's corpus.[25] He superimposes onto the image of Plato's Academy the ancient metaphor of exegesis as progressing into a temple's inner sanctum. Ficino and his fellow humanists inherited from the ancients the practice of presenting levels of exegesis according to the architectural metaphor of progressing through stages of a pagan temple. This metaphor, found as early as Varro (116–27 BCE) among the Latins,[26] is usually presented as variations on a theme containing the following stages: popular interpretation (outside the temple); grammatical readings of *verba*, or λέξεις (the threshold of the vestibule of the temple); the interpretation of philosophical content (advancing through the *pronaos* into the temple itself); and finally turning to the anagogical or theological meaning of a text (penetrating into the temple's inner sanctum, the *adyton*). Already in Plotinus one finds important uses of the image of the adyton to explain henosis, and among Iamblichus, Proclus, and other Neoplatonists it is deployed to explain the exegetical approach to the Platonic corpus and the cursus of studies in the Neoplatonic scale of disciplines. Proclus makes this clear, for example, in his commentary on the *First Alcibiades*, which he believes, following Iamblichus, should be the first work taught from the Platonic corpus and a propaedeutic introduction leading toward the final theological dialogues. The figurative advance through the textual temple therefore maps onto Proclus's triad of ἐπιστροφή-πρόοδος-μονή and is understood as the purgative conversion (ἐπιστροφή) through which the soul becomes initiated by means of the rites of minor and greater Platonic mysteries in order to remain with the One (μονή).[27] Augustine employs the image in *Contra Academicos* in order to describe Antiochus of Ascalon's sacrilegious introduction of certain evil Stoic ashes into the adyta, the inner sanctums, of Plato's Academy.[28] This long tradition has its roots in the very language of mysteries that Plato himself employs[29]—a point not lost on Ficino, who deploys the mystagogic image of an *accessus* into the adyta of Platonic mysteries in his numerous prologues and in his writings on the Platonic corpus and on Neoplatonic texts.[30]

The playful dramatic setting for the letter on the *Concordia Mosis et Platonis* is Martelli's arrival at Plato's Academy, where he is greeted not only by the Athenian Stranger but also by all of Plato's dramatis personae, that is, by Parmenides, Protagoras, Laches, Phaedrus, Philebus, and others, as well as by characters of Platonic myth, such as Er and Diotima, and by later Platonists like Philo, Plotinus, Iamblichus, Proclus, and even Augustine, all of whom guide the reader into the Platonic mysteries. In the letter to Martelli, Ficino makes each

Platonic πρόσωπον voice specific opinions or dogmas. He concisely distils his interpretive findings in the *Laws* when he presents Martelli to the Athenian Stranger, accompanied by a series of other interlocutors: "There [in the Academy] Philebus, Theaetetus, Phaedo, Phaedrus, and Socrates teach that our happiness (blessedness, *beatitudinem*) consists only in becoming like and in taking delight in God himself. You will hear a certain old Athenian asserting that the world is arranged by the word of God and that God is the measure of all things, especially if God becomes man (*si Deus fiat homo*). Just as you will hear him striking down the proud with lightning bolts as rebellious against God and approving the humble as most beloved of God. Finally, you will hear him predicting that whether they descend into hell or ascend to heaven, they will discover divine judgment everywhere."[31] These various characters become teachers in Platonism, pointing the student to the ethical goal of divinization and assimilating to God. Reading the Platonic corpus is thus, for Ficino, itself a transformative experience. Having become a godlike Platonic philosopher, the guest in the Academy becomes like Plato himself, the anonymous Athenian Stranger.

The Stranger, here described as *Atheniensis Senex*,[32] presents the following dogmas: God created and arranged the world by means of the logos; he is the measure of all things, was incarnated into man, has no tolerance for the prideful who rebel against God, favors the humble and meek, and confirms the existence of divine judgment in the afterlife. Concerning the criticism of those who rebel against God, it seems that Ficino is interpreting the strict laws against atheism proposed by the Athenian Stranger in the dialogue.[33] That the humble are the most beloved of God is Ficino's interpretation of the laws that, in the dialogue, protect strangers, foreigners, guests, and pilgrims (ξένοι) because they are under the guardianship of Zeus. He relates these laws to a Homeric custom of ξενία, or hospitality, which in turn is related to the belief that any stranger could be a god traveling among men in disguise or costume—a belief criticized in the *Republic*.[34] The recognition that Plato teaches humility might also be an indirect way for Ficino to rebuke Augustine's repeated criticism of Platonic pride.

As for the remaining dogmas, Ficino finds the doctrines concerning creation, the logos, and divine judgment in his interpretation of *Laws* 715e: "O men, that God who, as old tradition tells, holdeth the beginning, the end, and the centre of all things that exist, completeth his circuit by nature's ordinance in straight, unswerving course. With him followeth Justice always, as avenger of them that fall short of the divine law."[35] Scholars have remarked that in this passage Plato reveals a fragment of an ancient Orphic hymn, with which Ficino

was clearly familiar, since he quotes it as early as 1457 in his *De divino furore*.[36] At this stage Ficino was probably not making use of the Greek sources for the hymn, yet by the time he quotes it in his *Philebus* commentary, his *Platonic Theology*, his *Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum*, his commentary on Plotinus, and his *epitome* on the *Laws*, he is drawing directly on the Greek sources. In fact, in these works he quotes the hymn along with book 4 of the *Laws* and interprets it with the help of a scholion to *Laws* 715e on his Greek manuscript of Plato, which is different from how one finds the the hymn in *De mundo* and in *De divino furore* (Table 4).

The scholiast proposes the reading of Jove as God and as the efficient and final cause of everything. He also indicates that the old saying mentioned by the Athenian Stranger is, in fact, an Orphic hymn about Jove. In order to confirm that the golden dogma of Moses is found in the *Laws*, Ficino follows the advice

Table 4. Comparison of the scholion to *Laws* 715e in Ficino's manuscript of the Platonic dialogues, and two passages from his *epitome* to Plato's *Laws*

Anonymous scholion in MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09, f. 306r, quoted in Greene 1938	Marsilio Ficino, *In dialogum primum De legibus*
Θεὸν μὲν τὸν δημιουργὸν σαφῶς, παλαιὸν δὲ λόγον λέγεται τὸν Ὀρφικόν, ὅς ἐστιν οὗτος— Ζεὺς ἀρχή, Ζεὺς μέσσα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται· Ζεὺς πύθμην γαίης τε καὶ οὐρανοῦ ἀστεροέντος.	Item ubi ait Deum rerum principia, et fines, et media continere, intellige Deum esse causam rerum efficientem, atque finalem, servare omnia, omnibusque adesse. —Ficino 1576: 2: 1499.
καὶ ἀρχὴ μὲν οὗτος ὡς ποιητικὸν αἴτιον, τελευτὴ δὲ ὡς τελικόν, μέσα δὲ ὡς ἐξ ἴσου πᾶσι παρών, κἂν πάντα διαφόρως αὐτοῦ μετέχῃ. εὐθείᾳ δὲ τὸ κατὰ δίκην σημαίνει καὶ ἀξίαν, καὶ ἀπαρεγκλίτως, καὶ οἱονεὶ κανόνι ἑνί. τὸ δὲ περιπορευόμενος τὸ αἰωνίως, τὸ ἀεὶ ὡς αὕτως καὶ κατὰ τὰ αὐτά· ἡ γὰρ περιφορὰ τοῦτο ἔχει ὡς ἐν αἰσθητοῖς. —*Scholia Platonica*, 317	Tu vero angelica haec aureaque praecepta servabis, alta mente reposita. Quod autem mysteria haec antiquo ait sermone constare, Mosaico possumus intelligere. Possumus quoque et Mercuriali quodam, et Orphico, apud quos eiusmodi multa perlegimus, et illa quidem evidentissima, quae recensere grandius iam prohibet argumentum. At si Orphicos de Iove, de lege, de iudicio, et iustitia, et Nemesi hymnos legeris, haec ad verbum invenies omnia. —Ibid.

from the scholion in his *epitome* and offers his own reading, which draws on the writings of Hermes Trismegistus and the hymn of Nemesis. *De mundo* speaks to Nemesis before the Orphic hymn, so the allusion to Nemesis could be further evidence that the work is one of Ficino's sources. The hymn was on occasion discussed among Neoplatonists, most notably by Proclus, who partially quotes the fragment in his *Platonic Theology* and also discusses it in his *Parmenides* commentary;[37] but since Proclus does not offer a causal reading of the hymn, it is clear that Ficino, in explaining God as both the efficient and the final cause, is following the scholiast.

As for the final dogma, the Incarnation, Ficino finds it shortly after the previously mentioned segment, in *Laws* 716c: "In our eyes God will be 'the measure of all things' in the highest degree—a degree much higher than is any 'man' they talk of."[38] About this Ficino writes in the *epitome* on the *Laws*:

> But the text reads as doubtful here. For in one place it reads as I translated it [i.e., *quam quivis homo*]. With these words it seems that Plato is confuting Protagoras, who says that man is the measure of things. His error is carefully confuted in the book *On Knowledge* [i.e., the *Theaetetus*]. But elsewhere it does not read "than any man" (*quam quivis homo*) but "if a certain man" (*si quis homo*), in this way: "God is for us the measure of all things: and much more so, if, as they say, he is a certain man." You could interpret this small section "si quis, ut ferunt, homo est" [εἴ που τίς, ὥς φασιν, ἄνθρωπος] as "if a certain man is the measure, much more is God the measure, for we ought not to live for ourselves but for God, through whom we live." You could perhaps also interpret "if God is a certain man" as "if he were ever to become man" (*si quando fiat homo*) and "as they say" (*ut ferunt* [ὥς φασιν]) as "the prophecies of the Prophets," if only this interpretation were accepted among Platonists as pious, as it is among many others.[39]

In the Athenian Stranger's statement that God is the measure of all things, Ficino not only reads a critique of Protagoras's saying (notably in the *Theaetetus*) that man is the measure of all things but goes so far as to find a prophecy for the Incarnation.[40] His Christological exegesis is, in fact, divinatory philology (*emendatio ope ingenii*) and is based on his deliberations over the two textual variants found in Greek manuscripts of the *Laws* (*emendatio ope codicum*), indicated by "alibi vero legitur."[41] We find a confirmation of the divinatory reading in his letter to Braccio Martelli, *Concordia Mosis et Platonis*, where Ficino renders the

passage from *Laws* 716c not as "quam quivis homo" ("than any man"), as we have it in his Plato translation, but as "si Deus fiat homo" ("if God becomes man"). Both readings were suggested to him by his manuscript of the dialogue.[42] The text given in the main body of the manuscript is εἴ που τίς (⇒ "si quis homo"), above which a scholion indicates the variant reading ἤ πού τις (⇒ "quam quivis homo").[43] The same two variants are, in fact, found in other Plato manuscripts.[44] Ficino's philological moves to interpret the passage as prophetic are as follows:

- For his Plato translation Ficino chooses the reading ἤ πού τις ⇒ "quam quivis homo."
- In his *epitome* on the *Laws*, Ficino focuses on the other reading: εἴ που τίς ⇒ "si quis homo" ⇒ "si quis, ut ferunt, homo est" ⇒ "si Deus aliquis homo est" ⇒ "si quando fiat homo" ⇒ "si Deus fiat homo"; and in his discussion of this passage, he considers the interpretation of ὥς φασιν ⇒ "ut ferunt" ⇒ "ut oracula prophetarum ferunt."[45]
- Then, finally, in his Latin translation of *Laws* 716c in *Concordia Mosis et Platonis*, his *Commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius*, and his *Commentary on St. Paul*, Ficino has distilled these thoughts and settles on the prophetic reading: "si Deus fiat homo."[46]

When, at the end of the passage from the *epitome* to the *Laws* quoted above, Ficino speaks of the "many others" who accept such a reading as pious, he is referring to the interpretations of George of Trebizond and Cardinal Bessarion. In 1450–51, George translated Plato's *Laws*, the critique of which is found in the fifth book of Bessarion's *In calumniatorem Platonis* of 1469. Ficino's general use of George's and Bessarion's works while translating Plato has been well established (though not of this passage in particular).[47] The following example, however, shows Ficino not just using previous translations but also having doubts about manuscript variants and debating their possible readings in a commentary. Concerning *Laws* 716c, Bessarion criticizes George's translation:

> Plato also rejects the opinion of Protagoras, who said that man is either the measure, the measurement, or the limit of all things; he also refutes the opinion in the dialogue *Theaetetus*, where it is written with more reasons and the best ones. ὁ δὴ θεὸς ἡμῖν φασι πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄν εἴη μάλιστα, καὶ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἤ που τίς, ὥς φασιν, ἄνθρωπος. "Let God," he says, "be for us the measure of all things,

> especially all the more than man, as some prefer." Translator [i.e., George of Trebizond]: "God therefore is the greatest measure of things and much more so, if he is a certain man, as is said." Therefore, it is said that in the view of Plato, God is a man, if the translator is to be believed. And because he is a man, he is the measure of all things, which Plato judges is impious to attribute to human nature. This is the way he [i.e., the translator, George of Trebizond] knows the opinions of the philosophers. And this is the way he understands Plato, whom he reproaches.[48]

One can see from this quotation that Ficino quotes George verbatim in his *epitome* when considering the correct reading of the passage. Bessarion rejects the variant εἴ που τίς and chooses ἤ που τίς. He therefore finds fault with George for accepting the reading εἴ που τίς in his translation and criticizes him for expressing the Incarnation in Plato's thought, while nonetheless daring to reproach Plato as a philosopher.[49]

What is most important to retain from Ficino's reading of the Greek variants to *Laws* 716c in both the manuscript scholion and in George and Bessarion's disagreement is that although in his *epitome* to the *Laws* and in his translation of Plato Ficino sides with Bessarion in adopting the variant ἤ πού τις ⇒ "quam quivis homo"; elsewhere he adopts the second witness, εἴ που τίς ⇒ "si quis homo" ⇒ "si Deus fiat homo," in order to conclude that Plato prophesied the Incarnation. Ficino thus chooses a more conservative reading of the variants in his philological collation of the text when he translates it but permits himself to push the boundaries of orthodoxy in his exegesis of the passage's dogmatic meaning.[50]

I have already offered a first instance of Ficino adopting the second divinatory reading in his letter to Martelli, *Concordia Mosis et Platonis*. He confirms this in two other, later works. In the third chapter of his incomplete commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Romans, on which he worked late in life, he addresses the reasons the logos came to mankind: "The large epistle, too, testifies that the Word, the divine light, and the life of God itself descended to human senses—ears, eyes, hands—so that men through the Son would be united happily with the heavenly Father [John 1:1–5]. Certain ancient prophets seem to have divined something similar, where they introduce some of the gods in human form, saving and helping men. Why, however, God, having made his Son a man, wished him to be sacrificed for mankind, we will reveal as follows with Paul. It seems also that our Plato touched in the *Laws* on something that

pertains to the human nature assumed by God, where he says: 'Man is not the measure of all things, but God is, indeed especially if God becomes man (*si Deus fiat homo*).'"[51] Ficino here quotes verbatim the divinatory reading of the Greek variant of 716c to support a Pauline interpretation of the Incarnation in Plato. Likewise, in his commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *On the Divine Names*, completed around 1489–92,[52] he makes use of precisely the same variant to demonstrate that the second person of the Trinity is proclaimed in Plato's *Laws*: "After this, Dionysius says that the eternal Son of God with wonderful benevolence assumed for himself human nature and at the same time did not change in any way. The Platonist Amelius venerated this mystery while recalling the Gospel of John; Plato, moreover, arguing against Protagoras, said that 'man is not the measure of all things, but God is, indeed especially if God becomes man (*si Deus fiat homo*).' We have also discussed the reasons behind this mystery in our book *De Christiana religione*."[53] In the exegesis from these two later theological commentaries, then, Ficino sanctions reading the Incarnation into Plato's dogmas through his divinatory philology of *Laws* 716c.

As one would expect, Ficino is also very familiar with the loci classici dealing with the comparisons between Johannine theology and Platonic philosophy. For this, his exegetical needs are served by *Confessions* 7:9 and by fragments found in Eusebius's (c. 260/5–c. 339/40 CE) *Praeparatio evangelica*, on Plotinus's first pupil, Amelius, and his judgment on the prologue of John's Gospel.[54] In his *De Christiana religione*, Ficino again quotes the fragment of the Tuscan Amelius from Eusebius, but on this occasion he combines it with an anecdote from *De civitate Dei* 10.29, about an unnamed Platonist who, as related by Simplicianus, had praised the opening lines from the prologue: "When Amelius the Platonist read it [John's Gospel], he swore by Jove, that this barbarian, that is this Jew, expressed in his brevity what Plato and Heraclitus had discussed about the divine reason, origin, and disposition of things. Simplicianus said that he heard a certain Platonist say that the prologue of his Gospel should be written in golden letters at the apex of temples everywhere."[55] Not much is known about this anonymous Platonist beyond Augustine's anecdote but, as Heinrich Dörrie explains, his approval of the prologue to John's Gospel was almost certainly meant in an adversarial manner, his wish being to teach Christians the true Platonic nature of their sacred texts.[56] When we turn to *De civitate Dei* 10.29, it is clear that Augustine is making a claim similar to that of *Confessions* 7.9, for he states immediately afterward that despite recognizing an affinity or even identifying the Johannine logos with the Platonic one, the Platonists arrogantly refuse to accept the Incarnation, preferring instead to wallow in pride and melancholy.[57]

Ficino's strategy remains different from Augustine's. He quotes the fragments of Amelius and of Simplicianus's anonymous Platonist so as to underscore their assent to the mystery of the Incarnation, which, he says, made a union between the lowly and the heavenly: "For just as they were the mildest in their way of life, and the most courageous and steadfast in the face of trials and labors, so they were, in equal measure, humble and lofty in speech. The philosophers think that unions of these kind are beyond nature. So, therefore, Christ, their master, as he had promised, transformed those rustics and fishermen into fishermen of men."[58]

Appropriately enough, Ficino's account of the Old Athenian Stranger in the letter to Martelli, *Concordia Mosis et Platonis*, begins with the famous quotation from Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica* that cites the opinion of the Pythagorean Platonist Numenius that Plato was none other than Moses speaking in Attic Greek.[59] The fates and reputations of Numenius and Amelius had been linked together since antiquity. Porphyry tells us that Amelius, who wrote a work defending Plotinus against the charge of having plagiarized Numenius, copied, studied, and memorized Numenius's writings; Iamblichus seems to have associated Numenius and Amelius in a now lost work refuting both of them; and, perhaps most important for Ficino, Eusebius quotes the fragments that record the two philosophers' opinions about Christianity in close proximity in book 11 of the *Praeparatio evangelica*, which contains a limited, but positive, comparison of Hebrew sources with the philosophy of Plato and the Greeks.[60] The two were also closely linked by Ficino, who ends his letter to Martelli with a reference to the Amelius fragment. It serves as an appropriate counterweight to the letter's opening quotation from the Numenius fragment: "But what shall I say about Amelius? He collects into a few words and admires all of that prologue of John's Gospel which is read daily in sacred worship. This is what they do; but you, Martelli, once you have entered the Academy and accepted these mysteries from the heroes inside, in addition to many other greater mysteries that a letter cannot contain, perhaps you will cry out 'Good' with the voice of Peter: 'It is good to be here; let us make three thousand tabernacles.'"[61] When we recall that Ficino is here characterizing the philosophers whom Martelli will encounter when he proceeds through the Academy, it is striking to find Amelius situated at the end of the list of "those who speak in the tongue of Plato,"[62] reading in common worship the Gospel of John ("in sacris quotidie legitur"). Since the prologue of John is read *ex Platonicorum persona*, the scene resembles a type of *communicatio in sacris* with the Platonists inside their inner sanctum. Nor should we pass over the fact that the letter closes with Martelli proclaiming a passage from the transfiguration (Matthew 17:4), when Jesus, Moses, and

Elias appear before Peter, James, and John; but whereas Peter speaks of three tabernacles, Ficino here mentions three thousand. The Platonists in Ficino's letter are therefore reading the books of the Christians *in sacris*, and conversely there is evidence that Ficino read the books of the Platonists *in sacris—pace* Augustine who, as we saw earlier, argued specifically that the books of the Platonists should not be read *in sacris*, even in their own temples.[63] If we also remember that in the letter to Martelli Ficino introduces Plato teaching the Incarnation as the Athenian Stranger immediately following the instruction of Philebus, Theaetetus, Phaedo, Phaedrus, and Socrates that the goal of Platonism is to become like God (the Platonic ὁμοίωσις θεῷ), it becomes clear that Ficino is assimilating Platonic divinization and Christ's transfiguration.[64]

Édouard des Places has demonstrated that Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica* was one of the most important ancient sources to make extensive use of Plato's *Laws*, so much so that the large fragments of the dialogue preserved there are important witnesses to the text's indirect traditions.[65] Examining the Numenius and Amelius fragments from the letter to Martelli, the reader is confronted with curious premodern approaches to the Platonic question and prosopopoeia. For Eusebius, the Athenian lawgiver is inferior to the Hebrew lawgiver, whereas for Ficino, both Moses and Plato are inspired mouthpieces for the prefiguration of the same divine law.[66]

When comparing Christianity to Platonism, Augustine sometimes uses prosopopoeic exegetical techniques similar to the one he employs in *Confessions* 7.9 to compare the Gospel of John to the *Platonicorum libri*. For instance, in *De ordine* 1.11.32, Augustine claims that Christ himself ("ipse Christus") agrees with the Platonists regarding the distinction between the sensible and intelligible worlds, because rather than saying "my kingdom is not of the world," he says "my kingdom is not of this world" (John 1:36).[67] In his later *Retractationes*, however, Augustine censures the youthful *De ordine*, since in it he expressed a Platonic notion *ex persona Christi et Christiani*, instead of stating it *ex Platonicorum persona*. Here is Augustine again: "But it displeases me that in these books [*De ordine*] . . . I said that philosophers who were never endowed with true piety shone with the light of virtue, and I judged that there are two worlds, one sensible and another intelligible, not from the *persona* of Plato or the Platonists but from my own [*persona*], as though the Lord also wished to say this, since he does not say 'my kingdom is not of the world' but [says] 'my kingdom is not of this world.'"[68] In book 8 of *De civitate Dei*, Augustine famously proclaims that the Platonists, above all other philosophers, are the closest to Christianity.[69] He also concludes the *Contra Academicos* by proclaiming encouragingly: "I am sure in the meantime that what I will find among the Platonists does not

disagree with our Sacred Scriptures." Ficino quotes this passage along with other loci classici in his *De vita Platonis*, to support the opinion that Plato was equal to the gods in penetrating the inner sanctum of theology ("divinarum rerum adyta").[70] Yet in the *Retractationes*, similarly to the way he faults *De ordine* because in it he made Christ speak Platonic dogmas, Augustine reproaches himself for having praised the Platonists in *Contra Academicos*: especially since, as he now contends, it is principally against the errors of these impious philosophers that Christian doctrines ought to be defended.[71] It is chiefly because of their propinquity to Christianity that Augustine believes that the Platonists deceive and lead us astray. Verisimilitude, which he tells us is a central tenet of the Platonists, may resemble truth but is certainly not identical to it. Yet it can still perniciously mask itself as truth.[72]

There is no equivalent in Ficino's oeuvre to Augustine's *Retractationes*, since he still quotes the "Si Deus fiat homo" variant from *Laws* 716c in his final work, his commentaries on St. Paul. Perhaps his 1492 *exhortatio,* which was first delivered to the audience of his public lectures on Plotinus but then served as a preamble for his translation of and commentary on Plotinus's *Enneads*, best exemplifies how Ficino treads on the exegetical fault line between orthodoxy and heterodoxy.[73] There are clear parallels between Ficino's exhortatio to Plotinus and *Contra Academicos* 2.18.41, where Augustine says: "That expression of Plato (*os illud Platonis*), which is the purest and most lucid in philosophy, the clouds of error having parted, became apparent especially in Plotinus, the Platonic philosopher who was judged so similar to him that it was thought that both lived (*vixisse*) at the same time, but since so much time stood between them, one ought to think that he lived again in him (*in hoc ille revixisse*)."[74] Ficino, in introducing Plotinus, engages in the same kind of prosopopoeic exegesis that we have seen in Augustine's *Confessions* 7.9, *De ordine* 1.11.32, and the passage from *Contra Academicos* just quoted. The textual parallels are apparent: the terminology "os illud Platonis" from *Contra Academicos* is repeated by Ficino in the exhortatio in order to present his audience with a brief spiritual lineage, beginning with Plato, continuing with Plotinus, and ending with himself: "First, all of you who come to hear the divine Plotinus, I urge you to consider that you are going to hear Plato himself speaking in the *persona* of Plotinus (*sub Plotini persona*). For either Plato was at one time reincarnated in Plotinus, which the Pythagoreans will easily grant us, or the same *daemon* first inspired Plato, then Plotinus, which the Platonists will not deny. It is altogether the same spirit which breathes both in the mouth (*os*) of Plato and in that of Plotinus. . . . Thus, the same divinity pours out divine oracles for mankind through the mouth (*os*) of both of them, and in both cases the oracles are worthy of some

very wise interpreter."[75] When Ficino addresses the Platonic question, he does not limit his investigation to the dialogues. He stretches the question's boundaries to include later writers, interpreters, and commentators, so that it becomes a Neoplatonic question. Plato himself becomes the prosopopoeic mouthpiece for an anonymous spiritual or daemonic voice that speaks *in personis Platonis, Plotinique Ficini*.

As we have seen, Ficino ends the letter to Martelli by modifying a quotation from Matthew 17:4 about the transfiguration. He likewise reveals the theological implications of his prosopopoeic rhetoric at the end of his exhortatio, by making Plato proclaim with regard to Plotinus the words from the Gospels (e.g., Matthew 17:5), where a voice from the heavens reports the divine filiation in the words of God the Father during the transfiguration of Christ: "Hic est filius meus dilectus."[76] Changing a passage from the Gospels that is expressed *ex persona Dei* (to use patristic exegetical terminology) so that it is voiced *ex persona Platonis* was too much to bear for Ficino's later editors, who cut and bowdlerized the passage.[77] The πρόσωπα of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are put in the mouth of Plato, who is speaking in the role of the father about his son, and who is also subsumed in a Neoplatonic prosopopoeic triadic lineage of three persons: Plato, Plotinus, and Ficino. In short, for Ficino, revealing Plato's πρόσωπον as the Athenian Stranger also reveals Christ's πρόσωπον in Platonism.

The dogma of the Incarnation, then, is *the* necessary truth of Christianity and remains the dividing line between Christianity and ancient Platonism. It stands as the central link, or way, bridging the infinite divide between the Christian creator and creation. Unlike late ancient Neoplatonists, Christians must face an infinite chasm between themselves and the divine—a distance produced by creation ex nihilo and only mediated by the descent of the incarnate Christ and grace. As such, the Incarnation is both an ontological and a historical truth separating Christians from their predecessors; and Ficino's philological and exegetical identification of the Incarnation in the Platonic corpus is therefore divinatory on the condition that Plato is said to have expressed this dogma (εἴ που τίς ⇒ "si Deus fiat homo") in his own voice *avant la lettre*. His divinatory reading of the *Laws* assures him of the continuity between Plato and Christianity. Likewise, as the previous chapter explained, Ficino also does not conceive of an infinite divide between man and the divine. For Ficino, man's thinking moves through mathematics, and ultimately dialectic, along a vertical axis of mediation: the derivation of metaphysical principles from the One, and the divided line's unbroken continuity to the One. Simply put, contrary to Augustine, Ficino thinks that since there are multiple forms of

Platonic mediation there are multiple avenues for divinization open to philosophy (knowledge, love, and beauty).[78] Ficino likes to quote from *De vera religione*, where Augustine speculates that if Plato and his pre-Christian followers were to live after Christ, they would become Christians: "Thus if these men [Plato and Platonists] were able to return to live again with us, they would surely see whose authority is easily consulted by men and, changing only a few words and thoughts, they would become Christians, just as many Platonists have done in our more recent age."[79] It turns out that for Ficino, rather than a few words, only one word in the Greek variant to *Laws* 716c needs to be changed in order to make Plato a Christian.

Epinomis: *Eudaimonia*, Dialectic, and Knowledge of the Divine

Concerning the place of the *Epinomis* in Ficino's interpretation of the Platonic corpus, the first thing to note is that Ficino complains to Lorenzo de' Medici that he does not have the time to write as much as he would like, since the printers are starving for his drafts and are ripping the papers out of his hands.[80] That Ficino was pressed for time when writing about the *Epinomis* is also evident from two other comments that he makes in the *epitome*: that he will speak only briefly about what the dialogue says about numbers, and that he has already dealt with much about these mathematical questions in his commentaries on the *Timaeus*.[81]

The *Epinomis* is an equally strange and fascinating dialogue. It purports to continue the *Laws*, and its interlocutors are the same. The Athenian Stranger (Plato's persona, according to Ficino) and Clinias resume their conversation about the Nocturnal Council, a group of legal guardians tasked with overseeing the education of the polis and examining its citizens, which is mentioned in the final book of the *Laws* (968d4–e1). The dialogue's authenticity was questioned even in antiquity. Proclus doubted its legitimacy because the *Laws* was conclusively Plato's last work and because its astronomical theories are not perfectly consistent with what Plato wrote elsewhere.[82] Ficino might not have known Proclus's remarks from his commentaries on the *Republic* and Euclid's *Elements*, or as they are recorded in the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, but he could have known that the *Epinomis* was ascribed to Plato's disciple Philip of Opus (supposedly the editor of the *Laws*) from Diogenes Laertius and the *Suda*.[83]

Why does Ficino accept the *Epinomis* as authentic if he at least knows from Diogenes Laertius of its possible attribution to Philip of Opus? Ficino never

explicitly discusses the question of its authenticity and only mentions Philip of Opus once, among the list of Plato's disciples in his *De vita Platonis*.[84] Ficino might have been encouraged to accept it as Plato's dialogue because he would have found it in his Greek manuscript as one of Plato's authentic dialogues in the last Thrasyllan tetralogy. But this is not an unassailable reason, since Ficino did not follow Thrasyllus's organization of Plato's corpus exactly. One must therefore look elsewhere for his reasons. That the *Epinomis* has an important place in Ficino's interpretation of Plato is beyond a doubt. Ficino thinks that the *Epinomis* is in fact a continuation of the *Laws* where the Athenian Stranger serves as Plato's persona. Most important, the *Epinomis* confirms a thesis at the heart of Ficino's hermeneutical framework for interpreting Plato's corpus, namely, that the goal of Platonism is the divinization of man. Here is Ficino defining the *Epinomis*'s purpose, or skopos: "But once the intellect has undergone all of this [dialectical training], and once it is united to itself, and through itself returns in unity with God, he says that it will be as happy (*beatam*) as it can according to its capacities, and that in the afterlife it will be altogether blissful (*beatam*). This is the purpose of the whole book."[85] Two related points about the *Epinomis* confirm Ficino's understanding of Platonism's goal as assimilating and uniting to the One (*henosis*): that dialectic serves as a means to this end, and that once one achieves this union one also attains a state of perfect happiness, bliss, or beatitude. In his *epitome* to the work, Ficino even argues that some philosophers are able to achieve this divine happiness in the present life. Ficino probably has in mind his three exemplary virtuous pagans (Plato, Socrates, and Pythagoras), but he might also be thinking of Porphyry's account in the *Life of Plotinus* that his philosophical master united with the One four times while Porphyry was with him.[86] The *Epinomis*, for Ficino, is therefore about virtue ethics (*eudaimonism*) and dialectics.

There is also much about mathematical disciplines in the *Epinomis*, however. In fact, the close relationships not just between the *Laws* and the *Epinomis* but also between the *Epinomis* and the *Timaeus*, on the one hand, and the *Republic*, on the other, are some of the reasons modern scholars doubt its authenticity. Ficino also thinks that these dialogues are related to each other, and his interpretation of them further reinforces the place of the *Epinomis* in Plato's corpus. At one point in his exposition, the Athenian Stranger proclaims that everyone should venerate the celestial bodies, not as though they were gods, but specifically because all of them are in fact gods. The Stranger then describes the effects of studying their orderly circuits (that is, astronomy) on the astronomer: "When we appoint them their honors, we are not given the year to one and

the month to another, but leave the rest without a portion or a time in which each completes his circuit, and so does his part to perfect the order which law, divinest of things that are, has set before our eyes (λόγος ὁ πάντων θειότατος ὁρατόν). In the happy man (εὐδαίμων) this order awakens first wonder, and then the passion to learn all of it that mortality may, for 'tis thus, as he believes, he will spend his days best and with most good fortune, and after his decease reach the proper abodes of virtue. As he has been initiated into the true and real mysteries by receiving wisdom in her unity in mind which is itself a unity, he will henceforth have face to face (κατ'ὄψιν) fruition of the most glorious of realities so far as his vision can reach."[87] It is absolutely clear that this passage from the *Epinomis* (986c1–d4) takes its inspiration from a section of the *Timaeus* (90b–c, discussed above in Chapter 4), which Ficino thinks is largely Pythagorean. In this section near the end of the *Timaeus* Plato explains that studying astronomy is a way to become like God, insofar as by studying the orderly circuits of the heavens human intellects assimilate to the very order of the circuits themselves.[88] In the *Epinomis*, therefore, as in the *Timaeus*, astronomy lays a claim to ethics and the possibility of helping man assimilate to the divine.

There is, however, an important difference between the metaphysical cosmologies of the *Timaeus* and the *Epinomis*. In the *Timaeus*, Plato argues that beyond the sensible heavens there is the Demiurge as well as the intelligibles that serve as paradigms for his cosmos. Even in the *Timaeus*, therefore, the study of astronomy, and its help in assimilating to the divine, is secondary to the study of the intelligible. In the *Epinomis*, however, the cosmos itself is the limit of the divine. The celestial objects are themselves the gods, and the whole metaphysical order of Platonism is no longer based on the transcendental intelligible world.

That the *Epinomis*'s cosmos is both immanent and divine has important consequences for the dialogue's understanding of mathematical disciplines and their relationship to the supreme part of Plato's philosophy: dialectic. The final book of the *Laws* ends without explaining the educational curriculum of the Nocturnal Council. The *Epinomis* picks up where it leaves off. To fill the silences of the *Laws* on this topic the author of the *Epinomis* turns to the *Republic*. Since the Nocturnal Council is supposed to be the supreme council of the philosophers governing the city, it only makes sense that the *Epinomis*'s Platonic author would turn to the curriculum of disciplines in book 7 of the *Republic* to explain the education of the Nocturnal Council. This is exactly what the author does, but the metaphysical and cosmological differences between the *Epinomis* and Plato's *Republic*, as I outlined above for the *Timaeus*, lead to a reinterpretation of the *Republic*'s educational curriculum. The *Republic*, one might remember, argues

that philosophers should be educated in the mathematical sciences following a specific pedagogical order: first they will study arithmetic, then plane geometry, followed by stereometry (that is, the geometric study of three-dimensional shapes), followed by the sister sciences of music or harmony and astronomy. Once this cursus is completed, the philosophers will then study the highest form of knowledge: dialectic. The *Epinomis* follows this specific order for the study of mathematical disciplines but in so doing also devaluates dialectic's role from being the supreme part of philosophy to being nothing more than a heuristic and ancillary discipline. That is, because the Athenian Stranger argues for an immanent cosmos, which is itself divine, and in which the celestial objects are themselves gods, the highest form of human knowledge becomes astronomy; for only astronomy studies the gods and their orderly circuits. In other words, astronomy becomes theology. All that is left for dialectic is the minor role of clarifying one's understanding of astronomy and of checking for mistakes by way of questions and answers.[89]

This is not how Ficino interprets the *Epinomis*. He does indeed identify the sources for the *Epinomis*'s educational curriculum in the *Republic*. Very much like his early organization of the Platonic corpus for Cosimo, like his *De amore*, and indeed like his understanding of the *Republic*'s divided line, his *epitome* to the *Epinomis* also explains that there is a specific hierarchical order to this training that leads to supreme happiness or beatitude in assimilating to God.[90] Ficino then outlines this specific order in his *epitome*. Plato explains that we have the capacity to reach this end because the virtuous power to do so has been naturally imparted to us but that it is not solely within our own power to achieve this. Specifically, one reaches the goal of Platonic happiness through moral and contemplative virtues. Contemplation itself is attained by way of its own precise order, namely, the mathematical curriculum of the *Republic*. The philosopher, therefore, studies all of the aforementioned branches of mathematics in their appropriate sequence (*ordo*) before reaching dialectic.

> Finally, he places dialectic, that is, metaphysic or the theological capstone, the queen, as it were, of all the mathematical sciences, namely, since it uses each discipline as individual steps to find and worship God. But he proves that there are three functions of this queen concerning the other powers. First, she oversees the complete multitude of them. Second, she discerns that there is one common connection in all of them. Third, she sees clearly by which ratio this multitude of mathematics, and their union, unites toward the divine Good, the

> One itself. He adds, however, that unless the union of these mathematical sciences that leads to the divine One is understood, all will ascend completely in vain. Nor can the One be perceived in them, unless they are in the presence of the One, from which they receive unity itself. But once the intellect has undergone all of this [dialectical training], and once it is united to itself, and through itself returns in unity with God, he says that it will be as happy as it can be according to its capacities, and that in the afterlife it will be altogether blissful. This is the purpose of the whole book.[91]

This passage alone demonstrates that Ficino does not understand the *Epinomis* in the same manner as most modern readers of the dialogue. For Ficino, the Athenian Stranger does not supplant the rule of dialectic with astronomy; he specifically calls dialectic the queen of the disciplines so it cannot by definition be an ancillary science. In other words, dialectic is for him the capstone (or copestone) to the mathematical disciplines.[92] Ficino also understands dialectic not only as overseeing all of the mathematical disciplines but also as a kind of mathesis universalis, that is, a way in which all of the different branches of mathematics and knowledge are united. What is more, dialectic's method of unification allows the philosopher to unite with the One—a conviction that equally has ethical and metaphysical implications. Plato himself had described dialectic as the capstone of mathematics (*Resp.* 534e), but Ficino's strong argument that dialectic unites them in common principles (a mathesis universalis), which themselves derive their unity from the One, reveals that he is interpreting the *Epinomis* with the help of Neoplatonic guides. Again contrary to most modern interpretations of the *Epinomis*, for Ficino the Athenian Stranger does not argue for an immanent cosmos. Like modern interpretations, Ficino does in fact think that the *Epinomis* argues for the divinization of the whole cosmos, but he does not understand the cosmos according to an immanent ontology. Rather, he turns to Neoplatonic emanation and henology to make sense of this. He thinks the cosmos is divine because it participates in the One.[93]

Modern readers of the *Epinomis* interpret the passage at 986c as speaking about how astronomy in effect becomes theology. As I mentioned, the reason for this is that in studying the circuits of the heavenly objects the astronomer is actually seeing the visible order of the divine. According to such a reading, the logos in the passage should be understood as an immanent logos, that is, the divine reason of the cosmos is visible because there is no invisible and transcendental realm in the *Epinomis*'s immanent metaphysics.

Ficino reads it otherwise. For him, the *Epinomis*, since it is in fact an expression of Plato's cosmology, does indeed contain a transcendental and intelligible realm. *Epinomis* 986c would thus have leapt out to Ficino specifically because it claims that the divine logos is visible. Augustine, to repeat, famously said that he found in Platonism formulations of the Johannine logos insofar as it was with God in the beginning, that is, invisible and transcendent but not of the Johannine logos, insofar as it became manifest and incarnate on earth, that is, visible in the person of Christ. It might sound far fetched to modern ears that Ficino once more finds a reference to Christ's Incarnation in *Epinomis* 986c, but it agrees perfectly well with the fact that Plato's persona, namely, the Athenian Stranger, also prophetically states at *Laws* 716c: "God is for us the measure of all things, and much more so, if he becomes man (*si deus fiat homo*)." Thus, for Ficino, the Athenian Stranger is not advocating for the immanent metaphysical order of celestial circuits when he says that the visible logos is the most divine thing that there is, he is merely confirming what he said in the fourth book of the *Laws,* that God will be the greatest measure of all things, especially if he becomes man. The translation of *logos* in this passage with *ratio* further emphasizes the mathematical dimensions present in Ficino's understanding of Christ as measure (μέτρον; *mensura*) at *Laws* 716c. Two further points confirm my understanding of Ficino's reasoning here.

First, the fact that the *Epinomis* immediately after 986c says that this logos awakens happiness in man (see the full passage in my quotation above) corroborates all that Ficino believes regarding both the place of mathematics in virtue ethics, as a way toward perfected beatitude in assimilating to God, and the importance of the specific mathematical cursus of disciplines in the *Epiniomis*. Second, in turning the astronomer into a theologian, the *Epinomis* speaks of the happiest man's sight of this most divine order as a "face to face fruition of the most glorious of realities so far as his vision can reach." For Ficino, however, the passage once more speaks to something like a Platonic beatific vision. Notably, the passage's language itself suggests to him that the visible manifestation of the divine logos in the cosmos should be read as a prophecy for Christ. To be more specific, the passage speaks of this vision, in the translation of Taylor, as a face-to-face vision of the divine. The Greek, κατ'ὄψιν, would have immediately invoked connotations of the vivid presence of a person before the beholder's eyes. As a reminder, in his *De amore* Ficino specifically employed rhetorical techniques of enargeia by putting forward Socrates' persona before our eyes (*ante oculos*), and in his preface to his *Commentaria Platonis* to Lorenzo de' Medici he argued that Plato himself employed this same rhetorical strategy by

putting personae before our eyes (*personas loquentes ante oculos ponat*). The passage from *Epinomis* must have evoked for Ficino the Greek visual etymology of prosopon, as what is present before one's eyes, and further suggested to him that the visual manifestation of the divine logos in the passage should be read as a divine prosopon, that is, the persona Christi.[94] His belief that *Epinomis* 986c is a prophetic passage, like *Laws* 716c, revealing Plato's foreknowledge of the Incarnation, is most certainly an idiosyncratic reading of the dialogue, but it is also based on his identification of the Athenian Stranger, and on his divinatory philology on *Laws* 716c. Given that his interpretation of the *Epinomis* agrees nicely with his interpretation of the Platonic corpus as a whole, it stands to reason that Ficino is utilizing some of the same sources for his interpretation.

I have already pointed out how Ficino's interpretation of the *Epinomis* differs from three central features of its modern reading: first, in attributing its authorship to Plato; second, in believing that the dialogue still upholds a Platonic theory of transcendental intelligibles; and third, in arguing that the dialogue, like the *Republic*, puts forward an ordered sequence for the mathematical sciences that culminates in dialectic, which to reiterate is not just the capstone of mathematics but also a mathesis universalis that binds them through common principles united and derived from the One. These three points determine Ficino's interpretation of the dialogue. Ancient interpreters of Plato known to Ficino had previously argued all three points.

It is true that Plotinus does not do very much with the *Epinomis*, but a recent study makes the case that there are clear textual parallels between certain passages of the *Enneads* and the dialogue.[95] It is also true that Proclus does not think that the *Epinomis* is an authentic dialogue by Plato (he makes the case in works that Ficino would not have known when he wrote his *epitome* to the *Epinomis*), but it is equally true that Proclus positively draws on certain texts by Iamblichus dependent on the *Epinomis* in his commentary on Euclid.[96] In the fourteenth chapter of this commentary Proclus inquires about two points: "Let us look back and consider what Plato meant in the *Republic* when he declared dialectic to be the capstone of the mathematical sciences, and what is the unifying bond among them reported by the author of the *Epinomis*."[97] On the first point, Proclus reasons that Plato calls dialectic the crowning or capstone of mathematics (θριγχὸν τῶν μαθημάτων, *Resp.* 534e) because it brings the knowledge of the different mathematical disciplines to their perfection by referring to common intelligible principles in the Intellect. Concerning the second point, Proclus first argues against Eratosthenes that the unifying bond (σύνδεσμος) of the various mathematical disciplines should be identified with proportion.

Agreeing instead with Iamblichus, Proclus thinks that proportion is but one of the common features of the different mathematical disciplines. Again like Iamblichus, he argues that dialectic should be considered the unifying bond of the different mathematical sciences, for only it unites them in common intelligible principles. Thus, even though Proclus denies Plato's authorship to the *Epinomis*, even he, like Ficino, accepts the ideas in the dialogue and associates it with the *Republic*. Proclus also agrees with the two remaining points of Ficino's interpretation that I sketched above, namely, that the *Epinomis* upholds a Platonic theory of transcendental and intelligible principles and that dialectic is the true queen of the disciplines. In their minds, the *Epinomis* develops a unified theory of knowledge—a form of mathesis universalis—on the basis Platonic dialectic. Yet Ficino is not working with Proclus's *Commentary on Euclid* while composing his *epitome* on the *Epinomis*. Just as in their respective interpretations of Plato's divided line, however, Ficino and Proclus are both working with a common source: the third book of Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*, namely, the *De communi mathematica scientia*.[98] Despite the fact that scholars have at times tried to distance Proclus's philosophy of mathematics from Iamblichus's—and there are certainly differences—a recent study has demonstrated that Proclus directly follows Iamblichus's interpretation of the *Epinomis* (with the exception of its attribution to Plato) to understand dialectic's role as the unifying capstone of the mathematical disciplines.[99]

In the previous chapters, I argued that Ficino is directly inspired by Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*. Once more, in his *epitome* on the *Epinomis*, there are Iamblichean undercurrents, specifically in Ficino's conception of dialectic's role as the queen of mathematics, unifying its different branches according to common intelligible principles derived from the One, and in his argument that by studying mathematics in a particular ordered sequence, culminating in dialectic, one can reach unification (*henosis*) with the One, and thus also attain a state of perfect divine happiness or bliss. In Chapter 4, I also demonstrated how Iamblichus organizes the *De commmuni mathematica scientia* according to the ordered progression of Plato's *Republic*. Given the close relationship between the *Republic*'s cursus of mathematical disciplines and the educational curriculum of the *Epinomis*'s Nocturnal Council, it makes perfect sense for Iamblichus to incorporate the material from both of these dialogues in the *De commmuni mathematica scientia* and for Ficino to find a guide for his interpretation of the *Epinomis* there. In chapters 5 and 6 of the *De communi mathematica scientia*, Iamblichus paraphrases large portions of the *Epinomis* (notably *Epinomis* 986c and 991d–992c) without, as he would do shortly thereafter in his interpretation

of the divided line, explicitly attributing the material to Pythagoreans. In the final statement of chapter 6 of the *De communi mathematica scientia* Iamblichus claims that studying mathematics in the best way possible leads one to its unifying end (τέλος). Just as in Ficino's reading of the *Epinomis*, the scholion to the end of chapter 6 of *De communi mathematica scientia* in what was most likely one of Ficino's primary Greek manuscripts of the *De secta Pythagorica* tells us that one ought to understand Iamblichus's statement here to mean "until it thus becomes its capstone," just as Plato describes dialectic in the *Republic*.[100]

Iamblichus's understanding of the *Epinomis* also agrees with a longer tradition of Neopythagorean interpretations of the dialogue.[101] Thus, with respect to the three particular points present in Ficino's interpretation that I have been discussing—the dialogue's attribution to Plato, the presence of the intelligibles and a transcendental metaphysical order for the cosmos, and the superiority of dialectic as a crown or capstone to the mathematical disciplines uniting them through principles—are on the whole also accepted by Theon of Smyrna and Nicomachus of Gerasa. Ficino translated Theon's mathematical handbook for reading Plato, and there is perhaps even a minor suggestive piece of evidence that he knows a passage from Nicomachus's interpretation of the *Epinomis*, since both Ficino and Nicomachus address directly the fact that the work's subtitle, *On the Philosopher*, is an appropriate designation of its subject.[102] To be sure, none of these ancient interpreters of the *Epinomis* shares the Christological implications of Ficino's reading, or the specific identification of Plato's persona with the Athenian Stranger, but they—and especially Iamblichus—are the supporting structure for Ficino's idea that the philosopher can assimilate to God by way of dialectics.

Letters: Plato's Epistolary Style, Apophatism, and Neoplatonic Silence

The fact that Ficino thinks Plato speaks in his own persona in the *Laws*, the *Epinomis*, and the *Letters* does not mean for him that in these works Plato abandons rhetorical artifice altogether in order to grant his readers immediate access to his true intentions. Ficino simply claims, for instance, that in the *Laws* "Plato speaks in his own Platonic *persona*."[103] This is a curious turn of phrase. It means that in a group of works Plato does not write his philosophy through the personae of Socrates and Pythagoreans but instead formulates his own rhetorical persona. It does not mean, moreover, that the Socratic and Pythagorean

influences disappear in these works, for Ficino firmly believed that in his lifetime Plato actually learned from Socrates and from Pythagoreans. Thus, for example, discussing Plato's rhetorical devices, Ficino claims that Plato writes the first books of the *Laws* as a foreshadowing of the seventh book: "In the first books and in the seventh, Plato is the most skillful painter, indeed sketching out shades in the first books, but painting with colors in the seventh book, to speak in the manner of painters."[104] Similarly, at the very end of his final *epitome* to the *Laws* Ficino turns his attention to Plato's style of writing in his *Second Letter*: "Without a doubt Plato either demonstrates or hints in nearly all of his works that these three principles, the divine Good, the Intellect, and Soul, are the principles of all things. Indeed, he covers this very point with obscure words in his letter to Dionysius."[105] I will address specifically how Ficino interprets Plato's obscure words in his *Second Letter*, but for the moment I wish to make two points. First, Ficino does not think that in his letters Plato drops the rhetorical mask to reveal his true authorial face; in fact, he even conceals it with obscure words. Second, the fact that Plato does not abandon rhetorical artifice in his letters does not mean that the change of genre, from dialogue to epistle, is insignificant for Ficino. On the contrary, how Ficino understands Plato's change of stylistic register in the letters reveals much about how he interprets Plato as a writer and philosopher.

Most Plato scholars now consider the great majority—if not all—of Plato's epistles to be pseudepigrapha.[106] Ficino accepts all of the thirteen letters that he read in his manuscripts, with the exception of three. He dismisses the final supposed *Thirteenth Letter* and does not even translate it, since all scholars consider it spurious.[107] Ficino also thinks that two other letters were not Plato's, namely, the *First* and the *Fifth Letters*, which he believes to have been written by Dion, Plato's disciple in Syracuse—whom Ficino calls an *auditor*, perhaps recalling the Pythagorean way of calling certain disciples *akousmatikoi*. Interestingly, Ficino does not dismiss them as the fabrication of later forgers, like the *Thirteenth Letter*, but sees them as the product of Dion's attempt to shape his style on the pattern of his teacher Plato.[108] Thus Ficino does not think that these two letters are meant simply to deceive. They are the remnants of an epistolary game between a philosophical master and student, very much the model in which he conceives of his own Platonic persona in the rhetorical games he plays with his own epistolary interlocutors. Nevertheless, judging from his argumenta, these two pseudepigraphic letters are not of much immediate interest to Ficino. In fact, he comments extensively on only three of the letters: the *Second*, *Sixth*, and *Seventh*.

I will survey the other letters very quickly before turning my attention to the one that interested Ficino the most, the *Second Letter*.[109] His treatment of most letters can be sized up and put aside rather easily. According to Ficino, their theme is largely political virtue. He thinks that *Letters One* and *Five* are actually written by Dion in a persona Platonis. In the first, Ficino explains, Dion returned bribes from the Tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse along with the nuggets of wisdom that princes need friends more than money, that power resides in good and prudent men, and that we need to scrutinize our behavior. In the *Fifth*, Dion advises the politician Perdiccas to follow the counsel of older virtuous men. Ficino comments briefly on pleasure's relationship to the divine and Plato's travels while writing about the *Third Letter* to Dionysius the tyrant. The *Fourth Letter* to Dion contains, according to Ficino, Plato's advice to men of action (like Dion) to be a stranger to tyranny and to aim at instilling virtue in society. Ficino's comments on *Letter Eight* contain similar distillations of political advice to Dion's friends and relatives. The *Eleventh Letter*, according to Ficino, simply contains Plato's teachings that good laws need virtuous rulers and citizens. *Letters Nine*, *Ten,* and *Twelve* contain Pythagorean elements. In the *Ninth Letter*, to Archytas, Ficino writes, Plato advised Archytas that contemplative men must also engage in practical affairs. Ficino comments that in the *Tenth Letter* Plato explains the essence of philosophy as moral virtue. Once more writing on active and contemplative lives, Ficino reasons that Plato called contemplation a game that he learned from the teachings of Socrates and Pythagoras. Writing on the *Twelfth Letter*, Ficino explains that Plato, revealing his magnanimity and generosity, gave drafts of his writings to Archytas, perhaps with the goal of finishing the *Critias* and the *Hermocrates*.[110]

Ficino counts four specific mysteries in the *Second Letter*. The first is in Plato's statement to Dionysius: "It is a natural law that wisdom and great power attract each other."[111] Ficino here interprets Plato's words about the conjunction of power and wisdom in a metaphysical sense, claiming that this union is found at three levels in a particular order: in the divine, in nature, and in art. Plato had of course propounded in the *Republic* that a just city would occur only when power and wisdom were held together in the same person, namely, the philosopher-king, but here Ficino does not limit his reading of this letter to political philosophy.[112] For him, the union of power and wisdom is a tenet of Platonic metaphysics. Pseudo-Dionysius, for instance, inherits the Platonic union of the attributes of power and wisdom and discusses them as divine names of God. In his argumentum to the *Second Letter*, however, Ficino is working with Plotinus, especially *Ennead* 3.8, *On Nature, Contemplation, and the One*.

Plotinus describes the highest hypostasis of his metaphysics, the One, in terms of the power of all (δύναμις τῶν πάντων), a power that transcends the Aristotelian distinction between potency and actuality.[113] The One's power overflows into its first act, the first being, namely, Intellect. For this exact reason Ficino interprets the *Second Letter*'s claim that the union of power and wisdom is first present in the divine. Then, following Plotinus's logic, Ficino reasons that wisdom is present even in nature. In *Ennead* 3.8, Plotinus famously asks whether Intellect and its contemplative act are present in nature. His first listeners, like many modern readers, must have been struck by the seeming absurdity of the question, and all the more by Plotinus's response that nature does indeed contemplate. In this treatise Plotinus in effect inverts the traditional triad of being-life-intellect, which would figure prominently in the writings of later Platonists, especially Proclus, and was inherited by medieval theology as divine attributes via the Platonizing Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. The triad being-life-intellect has its origins in Plato's *Sophist* and was later employed by many ancient philosophers as a means to categorize reality. Thus, for instance, following this triad one can say that stones have being (but not life and intellect), plants have being and life (but not intellect), and humans have being, life, and intellect.[114] Contemplation as the self-reflective act of intellect thus becomes the privilege of man. Because of his explanation that even nature contemplates, Plotinus claims to play with a very serious topic.

Ficino, therefore, following Plotinus, writes: "Their vestiges are apparent in nature. For in what is naturally composite, whether stones and metals or plants and animals, and even in the highest things in the heavens themselves, the nature of the unity is such that a particular order proceeds out of the inmost power of nature and natural force and into both their very forms as well as their actions and effects. This order, however, evident from the outside and joined to the inner force of their power, seems to carry certain wisdom before itself. For nature proceeds in no other way than in an ordered progression, and wisdom proceeds in no other way than in an ordered progression—in fact, both progressions are altogether identical."[115] Plotinus theorizes that nature is the emanation of Intellect into the world by way of the Soul. The Intellect, he explains, communicates its reasons (*logoi*) into Soul. When Soul leans downward it acts internally as nature by extending these intellectual logoi to its farthest reaches, implanting them like seeds within beings to direct their generative powers, which are visible in the forces of nature.[116] Human artistry makes and produces with a power that taps into these inborn reasons within our natural ingenium. Insofar as this intellective emanation is actualized, its self-realization can be

understood as a contemplative self-reflection and a conversion to an originative source. Thus, like late ancient Neoplatonists, Ficino understands the triad in Plato's *Second Letter* of being-life-intellect according to the second triad of remaining-procession-return.[117]

Ficino finds Plato's second mystery immediately after his discussion of the union of power and wisdom. Here is the passage of the *Second Letter* in question: "Now my object in saying all this is to point the moral that in our case too, discussion of our acts will not forthwith cease with our death . . . for the noblest souls know this by intuition (or divine this, μαντεύομαι), while the vilest souls deny it, but the intuitions of the godlike (τὰ τῶν θείων ἀνδρῶν μαντεύματα) are more valid than those of other men."[118] Ficino focuses on this passage's prophetic language. He reasons that Plato is claiming that those good men who can somehow through divination know the existence of the afterlife will act virtuously and therefore become godlike: "Therefore, these men who are provided with the greatest ingenia are pleased for two reasons above all: first, since they love the inmost light of virtue they thus also love the external splendor of virtue, second, since with this splendor they always want to do good as much as possible, and they delight in this perpetual benefit for the human race."[119] Ficino's reading of this passage agrees with the virtue ethics form his *De amore*. How one behaves (*mores*) prepares one's inborn virtues to receive the transformative radiant splendor of divine light to assimilate to God.

Augustine does not sanction that pagan virtues are enough to reach the beatific vision and salvation without explicit faith in Christ, which Plato could not have known and which the later Platonists pridefully refused to acknowledge. Pagan virtues are not virtues at all for Augustine. Augustinian illuminationism might very well have inspired Ficino, but he transgresses Augustine's orthodox boundaries separating pagan and Christian ethics. Ficino's very point in comparing Plato's letter to Daniel's visions in his argumentum is to turn Plato's corpus into a holy book. Ficino confirms this reading of the *Second Letter* in his argumentum to the *Sixth Letter*, comparing Plato's divine fire explicitly to the Scriptures, and with the help of Augustine's nemesis Porphyry he writes: "Isn't God often called fire in the Holy Scriptures? . . . The spirits that are separate from body obtain the divine light immediately, but the spirits that are joined to earthly bodies need the fire of transforming love. Indeed, having been purified, and having become godlike, they at last illuminate divinely with the splendor of knowledge. For these reasons Porphyry says: 'Inquiring into the divine indeed purifies the rational soul, but love deifies it (*amor vero deificat*).' . . . for it is only in this way that it is anywhere open for us to be able to know and

become blessed (*beatos*). But only someone profane would ignore how much this agrees with the Holy Scriptures."[120] Whereas Augustine explicitly condemns Porphyry's purifications for denying that Christ is the only principle that purifies humans, Ficino praises Porphyry and says that his philosophy is in harmony with the Bible.[121] In fact, in this last passage Ficino must have had Augustine in mind, since he is closely paraphrasing one of Augustine's quotations of Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles*.[122]

The context for the quotation of Porphyry is Augustine's examination of Porphyry's slander of both Christ and Christians in this lost work (only fragments of it survive, largely in the works of church fathers seeking to refute it). In *Philosophy from Oracles*, Porphyry recounts the story of a man consulting Apollo's oracle to convert his wife back to paganism from Christianity. The oracle's response profanes Christ, which Porphyry takes as a cue not only to critique Christianity but also to deliver some praise of the Jews (to Augustine's consternation) for worshipping a God who is both law (*lex*) and king of all things (*rex ante omnia*). Given that Ficino quotes from this work by Porphyry specifically while commenting on Plato's use of "king" for the One Good in the *Epinomis*, as well as in the *Second* and *Sixth Letters* (more on this below), Augustine's treatment of Porphyry must have stood out to him as being all too relevant. Augustine then quotes Hecate's oracle from Porphyry's lost book. Contrary to Apollo's, Hecate's oracle apparently praised Christ as a holy man who earned immortality. Augustine concludes his interpretation: Porphyry is condemned, since he might bestow praise on Christ for his devotion in one oracle but denies his divinity and critiques the Christian faith in another oracle. Ficino does not mention Augustine, but he must have been thinking of him when quoting the Porphyrian passage from the *De civitate Dei* in his argumentum. We can only speculate whether Ficino included Augustine among the "profane" for failing to see that Porphyry agrees with Sacred Scriptures. For these reasons, I think it best to characterize Ficino's interpretation of the second mystery, like the virtue ethics in the *De amore*, as largely inspired by Plotinus—though Plotinus mediated through later Platonic traditions.

What Ficino identifies as Plato's third mystery in the *Second Letter* is by far the most famous passage of the document. The *Second Letter* states that Archedemus, the supposed courier between Plato and Dionysius, related to Plato that in learning Plato's philosophy Dionysius was not satisfied with the nature of the first principle. Plato supposedly began his response as follows: "I must state it to you in riddles, so that in case something happens to the tablet 'by land or sea in the fold on fold,' he who reads may not understand. It is like this. It is

in relation to the king of all and on his account that everything exists, and that fact is the cause of all that is beautiful. In relation to a second, the second class of things exists, and in relation to a third, the third class. Now the mind of man, when it has to do with them, endeavors to gain a knowledge of their qualities, fixing its attention on the things with which it has itself some affinity; these, however, are in no case adequate."[123] This particular passage was the subject of intense discussion and some controversy among later Platonists. Plotinus found in it an expression of his (or in his mind Plato's) metaphysics, and later Proclus polemicized against Plotinus's disciple Amelius as well as Numenius precisely on their interpretation of it.[124]

At the outset of his interpretation, Ficino indicates that he has already discussed this mystery in his *De amore* and his *Platonic Theology*. Indeed, in *De amore* 2.4 he assigns Giovanni Cavalcanti the responsibility of giving a line-by-line commentary on this passage in the larger context of his discussion of Platonic metaphysical triads, and in the *Platonic Theology* he discusses this passage in light of Plotinus's and Proclus's philosophy.[125] He says the following about it in his argumentum to the *Second Letter*:

> On account of this, the three orders of things are led back to the three principles and sources. Indeed, the order of forms to the World Soul, but the order of reasons to the Angelic Intellect, and finally the order of ideas to the Good itself. And because through the ideas all things are brought back to the Good, Plato accordingly says: "All things are around the King of all," that is, the ideas are around the Good itself, and through the ideas all things are around the Good itself. "Around the second," that is, the Intellect, "is the second order," that is, reasons that follow the ideas. But "around the third is the third order," that is, around the World Soul are the forms.[126]

Ficino interprets this passage in a strongly Plotinian manner—though I do not preclude the possibility that he also read it through Proclus's *Platonic Theology* and *In Timaeum*. All things are around the King of all because the One is beyond all being, and therefore nothing can be said to be in it. First to encircle the One are the ideas that, like Plotinus, Ficino identifies with divine Intellect itself. The divine Intellect communicates these ideas as noetic principles to the Soul, which in turn generates them in its productive power as forms in the world. Ficino, it is clear, interprets this third mystery according to Plotinus's emanative metaphysical order. Consequently, Ficino states that the One cannot properly be named.

In the argumentum to the *Second Letter*, Ficino's purpose in interpreting the mystery of the King of all is precisely to give an account of the origins of Plotinian metaphysics in Plato's writings. He makes no explicit mention of Christianity in this regard. However, once more discussing Plato's use of the terms "king" and "leader" in light of the Platonists' claim that the Intellect is the offspring of the Good in the *Timaeus* and the *Epinomis* 986c, in the argumentum to the *Sixth Letter* Ficino explicitly compares the Neoplatonic triad to the Christian Trinity: "Thus if by chance a Platonist were to explain the number in this way, he would thus be a Christian Platonist, but an Arian Christian Platonist."[127] In addition to interpreting the *Second Letter* in light of Plotinus's metaphysics, Ficino offers an intratextual interpretation by reading this particular mystery in light of the Athenian Stranger's prophetic recitation of the Orphic Hymn that God is beginning, middle, and end at *Laws* 715e, and the divinatory reading of God as the measure of all things at *Laws* 716c.

To locate and explain the fourth and final mystery in the *Second Letter* Ficino takes cues from the ineffability of the One in the third mystery. Because he cannot fully articulate his understanding of the divine One or of the metaphysical principles of his philosophy, Plato supposedly makes an appeal to esoteric philosophy in the *Second Letter*:

> Take precautions, however, lest this teaching ever be disclosed among untrained people, for in my opinion there is in general no doctrine more ridiculous in the eyes of the general public than this, nor on the other hand any more wonderful and inspiring to those naturally gifted. Often repeated and constantly attended to for many years, it is at last like gold with great effort freed from all alloy. . . . It is a very great safeguard to learn by heart instead of writing. It is impossible for what is written not to be disclosed. That is the reason why I have never written anything about these things, and why there is not and will not be any work of Plato's own. What are now called his are the work of a Socrates embellished and modernized. Farewell and believe. Read this letter now at once many times and burn it.[128]

Most Plato specialists now consider the *Second Letter* to be a forgery, imitating the *Seventh Letter*, which is still thought to be authentic by some scholars.[129] If the letter was ever meant to deceive, it seems to have worked on Ficino, who believes that the letter shows Plato to be a follower of an older tradition that distinguishes between the exoteric written doctrines and esoteric oral teach-

ings. The oral teachings themselves are guarded by the silence of apophatic philosophy.

Most of Ficino's comments on the *Seventh Letter* concern apophatic philosophy and Plato's distrust of writing. He writes that Plato thinks that divine philosophy cannot and should not be revealed publicly in writing or even orally, not simply to protect its message from misinterpretation but also because language is incapable of fully expressing the divine positively: "Plato does not say anywhere that nothing true and certain can be understood about the divine, but that what is understood about the divine cannot be said, and that a particular truth about these things is not understood by the same reason as other things."[130] Following a similar order that he establishes for his interpretation of the Platonic corpus for Cosimo and in his *De amore*, Ficino thinks that philosophy is largely an exhortation to moral exercises and purification in order to convert toward and contemplate the divine. These first stages involve dianoetic or discursive reasoning, whereas the philosopher, in fact, seeks a second noetic contact with divine truth, that is, to bask in the glow of its divine light. When a philosopher comes into contact with the divine intelligible, the forms innate within him come alive: "He also means that the forms of the ideas are inborn (*ingenitas*) within us, which were formerly dormant through idleness, are awoken with the fresh air of learning, and just as rays emitted out of the eyes, they are illuminated by the ideas, just like rays of light from stars."[131] Such is the way to becoming happy (*beatus*), Ficino says. Over and over again, he turns to the question of how noetic light touches or comes into contact (συναφή) with our intellect. We have already seen that he does so in his *De amore* and his *De vita coelitus comparanda*. Even when he explains this divine contact in terms of sound, prayers, and vocalizations he expresses the idea of touching the divine by way of a certain contact on a linear vector (like a ray of light) between the sounds that we project and the emanating force from the divine. His thinking is thus not limited to light; even contact with the divine by sound is noetic and not discursive. It is analogous to conversation face to face but different and of a higher order—and sometimes explicitly symbolic—insofar as the efficacy of the contact does not depend on a process of discursive communication to produce meaning.[132]

Ficino returns to the old question of Plato's style that had plagued other Renaissance humanists in his argumentum to the *Second Letter*. If there is ambiguity of signification in Plato's style, there is nonetheless a clear meaning behind his obscure words. In a manner similar to Bessarion and Poliziano's observations, Ficino picks up two commonplaces for Plato's esoteric style, one from Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica*, one from the Bible; just as Lysis the

Pythagorean reproached Hipparchus because one ought not to divulge divine mysteries, so the Scriptures prohibit giving what is holy to dogs. Ficino also relates that the rabbinic oral traditions of interpretation (*Mishnah*) and the habit of Pythagorean disciples to remain silent stem from the same philosophical reasons. Their distrust of writing is a form of expressing how the divine is fundamentally ineffable:

> From this it is certainly evident that according to the thinking of our Plato the divine is not discovered by us but rather is revealed from above, nor can the substance and property of the divine be comprehended by the intellect, and still less can it be explained in language and writing. Consequently, these things ought to be discussed and transcribed in the intellect, so that we may hope to exhort and prepare the rational soul to reach rather than demonstrate the divine. Plato thus writes nothing on the definition of the divine substance and property. He does, however, write quite a lot either through negations, or figures of speech, or in exhorting, or again in instructing, in order to lead one to that state of mind for which the abode of omnipotent Olympus will lay open from on high. After the intellect has turned itself back from inferior things to its very self, and when it has converted itself to superior things, it immediately reaches or touches, so to speak, the unity, stability, and simplicity of singular rest in the One. But what it has touched is not permitted to be expressed by man, according to Paul, and even less to be written, according to Plato, lest what is sacred is thrown to the dogs. But whereas he entrusts neither language nor letters with the explanation of the divine, he, however, thinks it more prudent to commit it orally than in writing, since writing makes it common to anyone. But he permits it to be spoken only to the most elect. However, he judges altogether that the dignity of the divine demands that we transcribe it with words from mind into mind rather than in writing onto exterior materials. . . . The Pythagoreans certainly followed this habit, and Plato did so as well. And in this letter he promises to send something through Archedemus rather than through writing. He declares, moreover, that what is written by him is actually from Socrates, whose proper duty was purification. . . . It is certain that Proclus received this also from Plotinus. If, however, anyone were to consider this diligently he would not demand from

> Plato the pedagogical form (*ordinalem doctrinalem*) of human interlocutors that he normally employs in his dialogues but will be content only with this style that leads on a straighter pathway to God. But even such a style or arrangement (*stylus sive ordo*) consists in purifying and converting. . . . And for these reasons all of Plato's dialogues aim at this sacred silence, and indeed some consist only in its purification, but others only in its conversion, and again others in both.[133]

Ficino describes an intellectual genealogy for apophatic philosophy that is at the core of Platonism. The writings of the Hebrews, Paul, Pythagoreans, and Hermes confirm this sacred silence. Importantly, Ficino also expresses a specific lineage for this learning, from Plato, through Plotinus, to Proclus.

Plato's change of genre and style from dialogue to letters offers Ficino an occasion to pause and reflect on Plato's prose, as well as how the dialogue form relates to its philosophical content. At the end of the quotation from the argumentum to the *Second Letter* that I have just cited Ficino writes that Plato's style of writing in the letters more closely resembles the style of the Neoplatonists, namely, Plotinus and Proclus, than his own dialogues. In his argumentum he therefore proposes the following explanation for how one ought to understand the relationship between Plato's letters and his customary style and dialogue form. First, he confirms his prosopopoeic understanding of the Platonic corpus. The dialogues are written in dialogic personae that are not Plato's own and are meant, Ficino tells us, to prepare, move, and convert the reader's mind to receive the true metaphysical doctrine that is not conveyed in the written text. Plato never set his genuine thought into writing but rather preferred to teach orally his true philosophy concerning the emanation of the One above being. Second, Ficino finds in the letters evidence that Plato sets limits to language's power insofar as it cannot express the doctrine of an ineffable One, which is at the core of Plotinus's and Proclus's philosophy. Third, his understanding of Plato's philosophy agrees precisely with how he judges and distinguishes the style of Plato's and Plotinus's Greek prose.

Ficino often noted, as many had done before him, how Plato frequently spoke in the grand style, calling the heavens down to earth in Jove's voice. In the letters, however, Plato changes stylistic register, from the middle and high styles to the lower *sermo humilis*, which Ficino believes to be the style often adopted by the Neoplatonists Plotinus and Proclus. This is clear from Ficino's study of Plotinus's style in his exhortatio to his audience for his lectures on Plotinus.

Here Ficino compares the spirit infusing the rhetorical personae of Plato and Plotinus:

> First, all of you who come to hear the divine Plotinus, I urge you to consider that you are going to hear Plato himself speaking in the *persona* of Plotinus (*sub Plotini persona*). . . . It is altogether the same spirit that breathes both in the mouth (*os*) of Plato and in that of Plotinus. But indeed in inspiring Plato it [the inspirer, *aspirator*] emits a more abundant spirit, while in Plotinus a more brief breath (*angustiorem*), and while I would not call it more noble (*augustiorem*), at least it is no less so; and sometimes it is almost more profound (*profundiorem*). . . . May [a wise interpreter] apply himself to unraveling the coverings of fictions but then work hard both to elicit the most secret meanings that are everywhere and to explain the words, which are as brief as possible (*verbis quam brevissimis*).[134]

With his characteristic puns, Ficino expresses his keen awareness of Plotinus's reputation for stylistic brevity (*angustiorem*) and the noble grand style of Platonic prose (*augustiorem*).[135] In describing the text of the *Enneads* as Plato speaking in persona Plotini, Ficino's judgment is in essence the same as the one he made in his commentary on Plato's *Second Letter*. For Ficino, therefore, both Plato and the Neoplatonists express the same philosophy in different genres and stylistic registers.

Ficino's source for judging Plotinus's prose in such a manner is primarily the philosophical portrait painted in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*. Porphyry relates that Plotinus began his philosophical career with a vow of silence never to reveal the teachings of his former master Ammonius.[136] Although the *Enneads* are voluminous, Plotinus apparently never wanted to write them. Their content is based on Plotinus's classroom teachings, and it is one of his pupils, Amelius, who first persuaded him to write down his thoughts when he was already forty-nine years old. Porphyry then joined the chorus asking for his writings.[137] Ficino's extant marginal annotations in his manuscript containing Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* help us reconstruct the ways in which Ficino squared Plotinus's stylistic and philosophical personae. Ficino notes in his manuscript margins that even if Plotinus is not diligent in writing, he is "assiduous in mind."[138] Next to a passage where Porphyry explains how Plotinus's lectures were misunderstood in part because they were more like conversations than professional speeches, Ficino writes: "Those who engaged with Plotinus at the

beginning made little of him, as they were not able to understand his brevity and his discourse. And he was free of all pride and fraud in the sophistic ostentation of debate."[139] Another marginal note confirms Ficino's awareness of Plotinus as a central figure around whom people gathered for intellectual conversations rather than a man of letters, since it expresses surprise over Porphyry having to persuade Plotinus to write. "Porphyry persuaded Plotinus to write more distinct and longer [treatises] than he was in the habit of writing."[140]

For Ficino, Plotinus's numinous mind works hand in glove with his writing style. Next to the passage where Porphyry says of Plotinus, "His style of writing is concise (σύντομος), but dense in thought, brief (βραχύς) and more rich in ideas (νοήμασι) than in words (λέξεσι), and he was often taken up in rapt inspiration (ἐνθουσιῶν) and would express himself with passion,"[141] Ficino jots down: "In Plotinus the sense is more important than words / divine frenzy (*divinus furor*) / he conveys the thing itself rather than the display of learning, as is the care of eloquence."[142] Since Ficino translates Porphyry's term for enthusiasm (ἐνθουσιῶν) from the passage as "Multa numine afflatus effundit," his translation and annotations testify that he conceived of Plotinus's intellectual activity or *studium* as a divine inspiration, an *afflatus* or *spiritus* breathing into Plotinus's language: a "divinus furor"—an enthusiasm that means literally being inspired or possessed by a spirit.[143]

Ficino therefore understands that all philosophical discourse is for Plotinus a propaedeutic for henosis, that is, for union with the One. Plotinus's own union with the divine became manifest during intellectual conversation when his face became radiant, reflecting the light of the divine Intellect. As Ficino records in the same margins: "Plotinus would glow in the face while he would speak."[144] Near the end of the *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry explains that while he was with Plotinus, he achieved his end and goal (τέλος καὶ σκοπὸς) of henosis four times "in an ineffable actuality."[145] Next to which Ficino notes: "Plotinus was often in rapture from the divine."[146] In short, Porphyry's description of Plotinus's written persona is but a fragmentary imitation of the full vatic expression of his oral teachings. Apophatic philosophy is not something that Plotinus did alone in silent contemplation; the *Life of Plotinus* tells us that it began in the discursive practice of conversing in intellectual community. Ficino writes in his argumentum to the *Seventh Letter* that it is in community where one develops the preparatory purgative virtues for reaching the divine.[147] Like the philosopher returning from the cave after having stood in the light of the Good, Ficino writes in the argumentum to the *Second Letter* that Plato's face, like Plotinus's, shone brightly when he taught.[148] All of this gives precise context for Ficino's

claim in his preface to his *Commentaria Platonis* for Lorenzo de' Medici that Plato speaks at times in a *docentis persona* but at times in a *sacerdotis atque vatis persona*.[149] His understanding of Plato's life and philosophic goals introduce his edition, just as Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* and Iamblichus's *On the Pythagorean Life* introduce the *Enneads* and the *De secta Pythagorica* with similar purposes.

These philosophical goals and hagiographic elements are also found in Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras*. For instance, Porphyry describes Pythagoras's appearance as noble and grand, and his speech and character as most graceful and orderly, and he recounts the story that Pythagoras died after having fasted for forty days in the temple of the Muses.[150] In his own *On the Pythagorean Life*, Iamblichus too narrates a number of Pythagorean miracles. For example, Iamblichus relates that after he left Egypt, Pythagoras took a boat to the shore below Mount Carmel. Having climbed the mountain, Pythagoras is said to have stupefied the seamen as someone who transcended human nature (a δαίμων θεῖος) as he descended the holy mount, ineccessible to common men.[151] To a Christian reader, Pythagoras's ascent up Mount Carmel would have called to mind the story of Elijah's prophetic climb up the same mount (1 Kings 18:21–40), Moses's shining face after ascending Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:32–35), and certainly of Christ's shining countenance during his transfiguration on the mount, where he is accompanied by Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:1–6; Mark 9:2–10).

It turns out that ancient lives of Pythagoras might even have been sources of inspiration for Christian lives of saints, including most notably the *Life of Antony* by Athanasius (c. 296/298–373 CE), which, it should not be forgotten, Augustine introduces in his *Confessions* as an imitative model for his own conversion and for Christian conversion in general.[152] Scholars have debated the signification of the parallels between Christian lives of saints and Greek lives of philosophers, most notably of Pythagoras. For example, scholars have demonstrated how a particular passage where Antony is said to have emerged from twenty years of solidude as a man initiated into the mysteries exiting a temple's inner sanctum (adyton), directly echoed the language of illumination, mysteries, and adyta in passages of Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras* and Iamblichus's *On the Pythagorean Life* (notably the passage on Pythagoras's ascent of Mount Carmel).[153] In a famous study from 1914, Reitzenstein argued that the general plan of depicting a holy man as well as some of the technical terminology and turns of phrases in Athanasius's *Life of Antony* depended uncritically on a lost life of Pythagoras used by Porphyry. More recently, scholars have argued that Athanasius appropriates Neopythagorean material to form a picture of Antony as an "anti-Pythagoras" or that his biography "stands in a competitive rather

than parasitic relation to [pagan models]." To take a particular example, the philosopher Pythagoras travels the world to learn from all wise men and religions while Antony is uneducated and relies only on God.[154] What is important to note is that while Ficino finds parallels between pagan philosophers and Christian holy men he does not wish to isolate them as incommensurable or competitive ways of life. Similar to the way in which he is open to different forms of mediation between man and the divine so too he does not reserve holiness to Christians and conversion to Christianity.[155] Indeed, Christ's radiant face at his transfiguration on the mount (with the presence of Elijah and Moses) is behind all of Ficino's reflections on the radiant faces of Plato and Plotinus, as well as their and Socrates' and Pythagoras's philosophical goals of becoming like God. It will be remembered that while Peter proposed to make three tabernacles for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (Matthew 17:4), in the letter to Martelli, *Concordia Mosis et Platonis*, Ficino proposes to make three thousand tabernacles in the adyton of the Platonic Academy. In orther words, Ficino does not reserve the transfiguration only for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

For Ficino, styles of life—philosophical and holy—also correspond to styles of prose. The language of rapture, divine frenzy, and vatic illumination used by Ficino to describe Plato and Plotinus's henosis—visible in their illuminated faces—is also analogous to the terminology that he uses for Christian theosis. Thus for instance, after a long section in *Enneads* 5.8.11–12, *On the Intelligible Beauty*, Ficino is struck by the similarities of this passage to the Gospels, and, underscoring the persons of the Trinity, glosses it as follows in his manuscript margins: "Note in the following passages the imitation of Paul's *Epistles* and John's *Evangel*, where one can see that he saw the mysteries of God out of body, that the highest father brings forth his son and all things in him, that he loves and praises in him and that the son of God came to the world from the father."[156] The passage from Paul that Ficino compares to Plotinus is from Second Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:2–4), where Paul describes his rapture to the third heavens. In his preface of his *Commentaria Platonis* to Lorenzo, Ficino similarly compares Paul's vision of the divine arcana with Plato's ability to call down the heavens (*arcana coelestia*) with his style.[157] Further glosses to the *Enneads* suggest similar exegetical strategies. For instance, Ficino also underscores passages where Plotinus speaks of a formative logos. In *Enneads* 5.1.6, *On the Three Primary Hypostases*, not long before he interprets the famous passage about the "King of all" from the *Second Letter*, Plotinus explains how the One emanates to the Intellect and Soul by means of a logos, to which Ficino pens in the margins: "Mind is the word of God; The Soul the word of Mind;

Nature the word of Soul (soul or reason); natural form is the word of Nature; He speaks almost like a Christian."[158]

Ficino also makes it quite clear in *De Christiana religione* that Platonic stylistic brevity is consonant with the vatic style of the biblical sermo humilis: "In addition, there are those profundities and majesties wonderful beyond measure, which are observed in the sober style (*sobrio stylo*), of especially Peter, James, and John, because they were once uneducated fishermen, but I ought to pass over in silence Paul who before his conversion was a most learned man, and after his conversion he rises in his Epistles completely above man. . . . What will we say about the Apocalypse of John whose book reveals the celestial face, and contains as many sacraments as words? What will we say about his Epistles, in which the sweet nectar and the divine sense is contained without the disguise of words? His Gospel seems to be written by the hands of God and not man. When Amelius the Platonist read it, he swore by Jove, that this barbarian, that is this Jew, expressed in his brevity what Plato and Heraclitus had discussed about the divine reason, origin, and disposition of things."[159] Ficino is therefore combining a passage that he read in Eusebius about the Neoplatonist Amelius's approval of St. John's Gospel with his understanding of the philosophical significance of Neoplatonic brevity.[160] Therefore, Platonic brevity and Christian sermo humilis develop analogous styles suitable to their philosophies or theologies.

In sum, Ficino analyzes the Greek prose of Plato's letters just as he often analyses the dialogues according to three stylistic registers: the high or lofty style of Platonic myths; the middle style for exhorting youth; and the low, or humble, style for teaching. In his mind, Plato's prose in the letters begins to resemble how Neoplatonists write. Studying the rhetoric of simple language and silence, Ficino finds meaning behind Plotinus's brevity, the style of the first and most forceful apophatic philosopher. In translating Plato and Plotinus, he ponders and discusses the philosophical merit of prose and makes stylistic comparisons between Plotinus's famed stylistic brevity and the sermo humilis of the Gospels. He is thus doing stylistic readings of language as it approaches silence. Brevity and simplicity in speech are related to apophatic philosophy and theology: the closer one comes to speaking truthfully about the divine, the fewer words are needed, since each word becomes infused and impregnated with greater meaning that the reader must unfold. In effect, Ficino is beginning to draw the contours of the stylistic register of the apophatic persona.[161]

His comments on Plato's epistolary style make it clear that Ficino thinks that in the letters Plato begins to resemble a Neoplatonist not simply because

Plotinus and Proclus did not write dialogues. Ficino's identification of four mysteries in the *Second Letter* all point to the fact that in his simple but obscure epistolary style Plato expresses the main features of Neoplatonism, especially of Plotinus's philosophy. In the first mystery on the union of wisdom and power, Plato teaches what Ficino reasons will become Plotinus's doctrine of emanation of the Intellect's noetic power in *Ennead* 3.8. In the second, Plato instructs Neoplatonic virtue ethics that one ought to purge and convert oneself toward these prior heights to assimilate to the divine. In the third, Plato explains how this assimilation happens as contact with noetic light participating across the spectrum of Plotinus's metaphysics, uniting the One to the lowest parts of nature. The fourth and final mystery is precisely the fact that in switching genres from dialogues to letters, Plato also shifts stylistic registers to a Neoplatonic style—simple and brief—which is suitable for conveying Neoplatonic philosophy.

Conclusion

> On account of this one can discern how uncertain are Plato's teachings, which have also been shredded by his followers into parts, smaller bits, and minutiae. But how much this pertains to Plato's dogmatism or confusion is not wanting in the Platonists who in our age relate another interpretation about him, namely, that he teaches everywhere. Marsilio Ficino, however, introduces into this understanding the discord that what Plato wrote in his own voice in the *Epistles*, in the *Laws*, and the *Epinomis* or on the philosopher, he wishes for it to be held as most certain, but what he argues in other books is in the mouths of Timaeus, Socrates, Parmenides, and Zeno he wishes it to be held as verisimilar.
>
> —Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Examen vanitatis*

> Platon me semble avoir aimé cette forme de philosopher par dialogues, à escient, pour loger plus décemment en diverse bouches la diversité et variation de ses propres fantaisies.
>
> Car, où [Platon] écrit selon soi, il ne prescrit rien à certes. Quand il fait le législateur, il emprunte un style régentant et assévérant, et si y mêle hardiment les plus fantastiques de ses inventions. . . .
>
> Platon dissipe sa créance à divers visages.
>
> —Michel de Montaigne, *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*

Ficino and Platonic Traditions

In this book I have argued that Marsilio Ficino adopts a hermeneutics for the study of the Platonic corpus that understands Plato's writings primarily as a unitary corpus capable, under the right interpretive direction, of transforming its readers, helping them become godlike. Ficino's reading of the corpus, we have now seen, takes on a few central and distinctive features. First, Ficino is very

sensitive to Plato's literary form in terms of both the dialogic qualities of his writing and his style. His close attention, as translator and commentator, to Plato's Greek prose helps outline the contours of his own Latin rhetorical persona. In doing so, Ficino brings a strong philosophical perspective to humanist debates on Cicero, imitation, and rhetorical personae. Second, he often adopts formal orders to structure the reading of Plato's works. This is evident in his organization of his early corpus for Cosimo and in his arrangement of the narrative order of speeches in the *De amore* according to virtue ethics. It is equally evident in his understanding of the *Philebus* and the *Republic* through his efforts to derive categories of being from mathematical realities, first principles, and ultimately from the One. We see this too in the metaphysical and ethical implications of Ficino's explanation of the cursus of disciplines in the *Republic* and the *Epinomis*. Third, Ficino's hermeneutics are strongly shaped by the forces of various Platonic traditions.

Concerning this last feature of his interpretation of the corpus, namely, how Ficino thinks with traditions, I would like to make three concluding points. First, I have argued that Iamblichus's *De secta Pythagorica* is a formative influence on Ficino's thinking. There are probably a variety of good explanations why scholars have largely ignored this influence on Ficino, but a few reasons come to mind. Unlike many of his other translations of Neoplatonists, his translation of the *De secta Pythagorica* was never printed—although he did circulate the translation in manuscript to a small number of his connections and printed the Pythagorean *Aurea verba* and *Symbola*. He therefore never wrote an eloquent and philosophically elaborate dedicatory letter for its preface, as he often did to accompany his other famous translations. Having translated the *De secta Pythagorica* when he was quite young, he also never polished his translation and never wrote a commentary on it. Despite all of this, because Ficino worked on translating this very large work at a very early stage in his career, Iamblichus probably imprinted his influence on Ficino's thinking when it was not yet fully settled. This is not to say that Iamblichus's influence on Ficino is extraordinarily stronger than that of say Plotinus, Proclus, Pseudo-Dionysius, and especially Plato himself. In fact, I have also argued that Ficino closely studied Proclus's *Elements of Theology* and *Platonic Theology* (which, for example, influenced his interpretation of the *Philebus*) when he was young, that his readings of Plotinus stand behind his *De amore* and his interpretation of Plato's *Epistles*, and that he also turned on a number of occasions to Porphyry, Hermias, and Pseudo-Dionysius. Indeed, Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius held such an important place in his thinking that he translated all of the *Enneads* and wrote

long commentaries on it (until c. *Enn*. 4.3.12), and translated and commented on Pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology* and *Divine Names*. Rather, my point is that he does not study these philosophers in isolation. Despite the fact that he points out differences between them (for example, between Plotinus, Proclus, and Pseudo-Dionysius) he views their thinking as stages in unitary philosophical and theological traditions. In this regard too Iamblichus is very informative for Ficino. In addition to being Ficino's primary source for understanding Pythagoreanism, Iamblichus, as seen in his *De mysteriis*, is also the only Neoplatonist to give any serious attention to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and his writings on theology and theurgy bring a strong Neoplatonic perspective to explicitly religious topics.[1]

Second, Ficino believes that these ancient forms of thought are living traditions. Plato's books do not lie open on their spines on Ficino's philological examination table waiting to be dissected by the disinterested scalpel of an historical critical method. The main goals of his work on Plato's corpus are, first, to translate it completely into Latin so that Ficino, his contemporary humanists and philosophers, the broader Latin intellectual world (including theologians and laymen), and all of posterity can have an accurate and widely available version of Plato, and, second, to comment on Plato in order to guide readers into Platonic philosophy. One of the best witnesses to the belief Ficino has that he is reviving a tradition, making Plato live and speak in his Latin world, is Ficino's own large humanist epistolography. In his letters, we see Ficino doing and, one might say, performing Platonic philosophy for a larger intellectual community.

In the fledgling works that he wrote before he mastered the difficult traditions of Greek Platonism, *De virtutibus moralibus* (1457), and *De quatuor sectis philosophorum* (c. 1457–58), Ficino already defines virtue with the Platonic goal of rendering us similar to God.[2] Similarly, in *De Deo et anima* (c. 1454), written in Tuscan vernacular when he was only twenty-one, Ficino formulates his account of a succession of ancient theologians predating Plato. Demarcating Platonism from other philosophical schools, he once more consistently argues that its goal is the divinization of man, citing for this reason the account in the *Timaeus* that man's mind has a circular motion like the heavens and the myth in the *Phaedrus* of the charioteer following in Jove's train.[3] Moreover, he invokes the opening lines of the *Confessions* expressing Augustine's desire to convert, along with opinions of Neoplatonists that all things seek to return (*si convertono*) to God. Instead of reading a strong polemic against Platonic philosophy in Augustine's words, he concludes that Augustine's conversion and the Neoplatonic return (conversion; ἐπιστροφή) to the One are commensurable: "Plato

writes that the only food that feeds and satisfies the mind's appetite is the father from whose bosom it has fallen into these shadows. Hence Augustine writes, 'My heart will not rest, my Lord, until it comes to rest in you.' Plotinus, Iamblichus, Proclus, Apuleius, and Avendantes [*sic*, Avendauth, i.e., the *Liber de causis*], the greatest theologians among all the Platonists also argue this subtlety."[4]

One of his youthful Platonic notebooks, which contains Calcidius's commentary on the *Timaeus*, Leonardo Bruni's translation of the *Gorgias*, and excerpts from Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, Apuleius's *De deo Socratis*, and Cicero's *Topica*, also gives us a glimpse of how Ficino read Augustine as a Latin source for Platonism. The notebook contains Ficino's colophon, indicating that Ficino copied it between February and March 1454, around the same period when he wrote the *De Deo et anima*. The two brief excerpts of Augustine are taken from his discussion of Platonism in *De civitate Dei*. In the first, Ficino quotes a chapter where Augustine discusses natural philosophy according to the Platonists, specifically their understanding of God's nature, the principles of being, life, and intellect, as well as blessedness. Of particular interest too is the final excerpt in the manuscript, which is again from *De civitate Dei*, in which Augustine explains the Platonists' moral philosophy, specifically that according to them virtue and happiness consists in knowing and imitating God. In essence, this twenty- year- old Ficino mines *De civitate Dei* specifically for infor-mation about Platonism.[5]

The interpretive approach of Ficino to his sources is also evident in *De Deo et anima*. In this tract, which he wrote about ten years before he completed his translation of ten dialogues for Cosimo, he equally claims that the Platonists, namely, Plotinus, Amelius, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Theodore, and Proclus, believe like Christians that the soul was created from a similar nature to God and that it returns to him in contemplation. Rather than seeing the advent of Christ as a fundamental break in providential history between pagan philosophers and revealed Christian theology, this work shows Christianity subsumed among the other schools of philosophy that argue for the existence of God and soul. This young Ficino has not yet studied all of Plato or the late ancient works that will consume his life, nonetheless he still softens Augustine's fulminating condemnation of the idolatrous or heretical Neoplatonists for rejecting Christ and for proposing different kinds of mediation between man and God. His religious thinking is more inclusive than exclusive in this regard. Ficino quotes Augustine's prayer to God in the *De Deo et anima*, accordingly, in the same breath as the Platonists, pacifying Augustine's critique to make the theologian aim at the same goal as the Platonists' subtle disputation.[6]

This brings me to the final point I wish to make about Ficino and traditions of thought, namely, that Ficino inherits a late ancient habit of organizing the history of philosophy, religion, and thought in terms of spiritual *diadochê*, or succession. This type of understanding of the historical transmission of knowledge is not a purely abstract history of a doctrine or idea. It is a habit of mind that requires actual persons to serve as spokespersons for the logoi connecting one generation to the next. For example, some of Ficino's sources maintain that a common feature shared by the traditions of ancient Orphism and Pythagoreanism is the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. In his *De secta Pythagorica*, Iamblichus expresses this commonality in terms of Pythagoras's life and personal connection to the shadowy figure of Aglaophamus, who supposedly initiated Pythagoras into the Orphic mysteries. Pythagoras then transmitted the knowledge of the immortality of the soul to his own disciples, who, in turn, taught this doctrine to Plato. Thus Ficino's prisca theologia is organized according to prosopopoeic reasoning, whereby, in his classic formulation of this lineage of ancient theologians, Zoroaster, Hermes, Orpheus, Aglaophamus, Pythagoras, and Plato become spokespersons for a single emanative religious spirit.[7]

Ficino sees himself as a living representative of these long-lasting traditions, yet his philosophical project also distinguishes itself from the late ancient Platonists in its attempt to incorporate Christianity within this spiritual succession in a manner much more explicit than the supposed implicit borrowings of the Platonists from Christianity. He finds a central tenet in the *Chaldean Oracles*, the inspired writings of Egyptian priests (chiefly from Iamblichus's *De mysteriis*), the *Orphic Hymns* and mysteries, Pythagoreanism, the various Platonic Academies, and Christianity. They might differ on their interpretation of this doctrine (for example, concerning resurrection, palingenesis, metempsychosis, or metemsomatosis) but they all hold that the immortal soul can become like God.[8]

Ficino also did not lose sight of the fact that Plato's two formative personae, Pythagoras and Socrates, like Christ, never wrote. These facts fascinate him and spur him into questioning ancient oral and esoteric philosophy, studying why soteriological philosophers left behind philosophical disciples, just as Christ had religious apostles, but no works written in their own hand, only transcriptions of their teachings and accounts of their lives. Like Plato, Ficino lived through a period that witnessed the dynamic changes of new writing media and cultures. In fact he was one of the first philosophers to take full advantage of the printing press. If he at times gives the impression of being an

ascetic person working by himself in the countryside of Careggi—how could he have got so much work done unless he sometimes found peace and quiet?—in reality he is a passionate lover of conversations, seeking new interlocutors in the city and its courts. He is also a bibliomaniac, surrounded by one of the greatest collection of manuscripts of ancient texts in the world, as well as by some of the greatest philosophical and scholarly minds of his generation to study them, and he is innovative in his complete embrace of the new technology of printing. Ficino, in short, lives in conversations around texts. Yet, perhaps because he is so focused on the written word, he is also spellbound by the possibility of recovering ancient oral traditions through the earliest fragmentary witnesses to religious thought known to him. Reaching far back in time to study the divine works of Plato's supposed predecessors (*Chaldean Oracles*, *Orphic Hymns*, Hermetic wisdom, and Pythagorean philosophy and mathematics), he believes he has found a certain correspondence between chronological and metaphysical priority: the ancient theologians' authority stems from their antiquity, insofar as they are the first to break from the silence of the forgotten prehistory of recorded philosophy and religion. We now know that many of the documents studied by Ficino to unearth these ur-religious thoughts are pseudepigraphic. Yet, for him, the validity of their witness to the truth is confirmed when their temporal (horizontal, so to speak) priority agrees with the vertical priority of revelation and negative theology. It is here that the reader is fully confronted with the esoteric aspects of Ficino's interpretation of Plato. The excavation and fabrication by Ficino of the pseudonymous ancient theology stretches human language to its temporal limits, to a religious time that predates recorded memory and written history, while his apophatic theology reaches to the upper vaults of time and language, bordering on the silence of eternity.

Ficino's Place in the Long History of the Interpretation of Plato in the West

Ficino's prosopopoeic hermeneutics of Plato's corpus also found a later formidable critic in the person of Friedrich Schleiermacher. In his 1804 introduction to his translation of Plato's dialogues, Schleiermacher addresses "those curious inquiries behind which person, at any rate, does Plato express his own opinion on this or that topic." He remarks that such "a question, since it presupposes that his dialogic form is only a rather useless and more confusing than enlightening setting of the completely common way of explaining one's thought, can only be

raised by someone who understands nothing at all of Plato."[9] Despite the often repeated claim that Schleiermacher "created the Platonic question,"[10] it is clear that he is not the first down this path. Rather, Schleiermacher's warning against asking, "behind which person does Plato express his own opinion," rejects premodern and early modern iterations of the question.

Schleiermacher reacts against those "curious inquiries," as he says, but whose inquiries specifically? Instead of pointing the finger at only one culprit, he is looking at a longer interpretive tradition, which he sees best represented by the biographer and doxographer Diogenes Laertius, and indeed he is setting his sights on the very idea of interpreting ancient philosophy with the help of later traditions. The first lines of Schleiermacher's introduction thus begin: "The Greek editions of the works of Plato tend to prefix the same biography from the famous collection of Diogenes Laertius. But only an incomprehensible devotion to an old custom could appreciate such a crude work, collecting the shoddy cobbling of transmission without any judgment."[11] Diogenes Laertius's *Life of Plato* does in fact introduce Greek manuscript collections of Plato's dialogues, as it does one of the primary Greek manuscripts used by Ficino for his translation of Plato.[12] Schleiermacher is, of course, an astute reader of the structural forms of texts, so one should expect to find meaning in the structure of his own compositions. He is, therefore, quite deliberate in opening his introduction by invoking Diogenes Laertius. He is not so much critiquing Diogenes in particular, or Wilhelm G. Tennemann, whose *System der platonischen Philosophie* examined the external sources for constructing a historical biography for Plato, as he is the long interpretive tradition of biographical hermeneutics. Ficino also imitated this premodern Greek scholarly practice by writing his own Latin *De vita Platonis*, which he gave as one of his first public lectures on Plato in circa 1469, and which he later attached as the introduction to his 1484 printed Latin translation of the dialogues.[13] Structural parallels are evident; while the older manuscript and print traditions of Plato's corpus begin with Plato's life, Schleiermacher's introduction begins with the absence of a biography.

I have demonstrated how a variety of external and indirect sources inform the reading of Plato by Ficino and help him contextualize the Athenian philosopher's oeuvre in philosophical traditions. Based on his readings of works by philosophers that scholars today usually call Neoplatonists, he often (but not always) follows a central strand of these interpretive traditions: a Pythagoreanizing-Platonic tradition. Schleiermacher also understood Neoplatonists to be largely under the influence of Pythagoreanism, but it is also well known that he criticized them for this reason, deeming them a form of Orientalizing Platonism:

"[Neoplatonism,] a composite of the secret wisdom of the Pythagoreans—who clothed their teaching in oriental symbols—and of the philosophy of Plato, took from both only what fitted the spirit of a quixotic and superstitious age. Its character was such that it everywhere misused and misunderstood its sources."[14] Along with the Pythagorean pseudepigrapha, philosophical biographies, and the anonymous scholion to the *Laws*, Ficino's later sources would be "contaminations" according to Schleiermacher's *sola scriptura* hermeneutics. For Schleiermacher they are disruptive forces shattering the self-autonomy of Plato's corpus.

Philosophy necessarily intersects with philology in Scheiermacher's hermeneutics. The self-autonomy of the dialogues must be grounded in the prior self-autonomy of the text, that is, a text free from external contaminations, corruptions, and traditional paratexts. For Ficino, however, the organization of the page in his manuscript makes scholia more than paratextual accompaniments. The traditions of manuscript transmission that copy scholia along with their source text create something like phenomenological unity between text and scholia—a unity that Ficino sometimes imitates in his own writings. While premodern textual commentators, editors, and translators such as Ficino did not use scholia in a critical manner, as later philologists did, their use of scholia deserves attention, since it too reveals scholarly practices and textual influences behind premodern commentaries, editions, and translations. One can on occasion trace the history and transformation of ancient scholia in Ficino's library, from their original state in Greek manuscripts, through Ficino's readings, until they find themselves translated into Latin and transformed into Ficino's printed commentaries. It is precisely this phenomenological unity that Schleiermacher understands as a contamination of tradition, which he wishes to avoid by limiting his interpretation of Plato solely to authentic dialogues.[15]

Schleiermacher, like Ficino, lived during a period of intense Platonic revivals. A major innovation of this later time was the rigorous philological study and editorial work on Greek texts of Plato. For instance, in the preface to his 1812 *Delectus*, containing editions of the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Phaedo*, and *Crito*, Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824), writing also on behalf of August Immanuel Bekker (1785–1871) and the publisher Nauck, identified a need in Plato scholarship. He proposed two important projects to ameliorate the conditions for studying Plato: a critical *recensio* of the Greek manuscripts, and a revised Latin translation of the dialogues. This was especially important because the dominant edition of Plato circulating at that time was the 1781–87 *Bipontina* edition of Plato's dialogues, directed by Wolf's former teacher Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812), which reproduced elegantly printed but corrupt editions both of

the Greek text and of Ficino's Latin translation of Plato.[16] The *Delectus*, as the name implies, is a sampling of what should have been part of a larger project for new Greek and Latin editions of Plato's complete works. The plan was to include an apparatus, notes from the Plato scholia and from Stephanus, new editions of Proclus and other commentaries, introductions, and indices. Unlike Schleiermacher, Wolf had no plans to publish a German Plato. In fact, he did not think highly of Schleiermacher's German translation of Plato, and still thought it important to publish a Latin translation.[17] In the preface to the *Delectus*, he gives certain praises to Ficino's laborious work but addresses the fact that there is no standard on how one ought to publish Plato in Latin—if one ought to do so at all. In the end, he explains that he chose to produce his own Latin translation along with the Greek text of these four dialogues.[18] Wolf handed over to his star pupil Bekker the aspiration and project of bringing to fruition a new edition of Plato's complete corpus based on a critical study of the Greek manuscripts. There would be no new Latin translation of all of Plato's works. Bekker simply published Ficino's original Latin translation from the 1484 and 1491 editions (which was an improvement over the Latin in the *Bipontia*) on the same page as his critical edition of the Greek. In the preface to the first publication of Ficino's Latin translation of Plato (1484), Naldo Naldi wrote verses about Ficino's restoration of Plato:

> But now lest the image of such piety die,
> lest philosophy lose its beauty,
> Marsilio, another Plato, returned to earth,
> and practiced what that first one taught.[19]

Ficino earned the praise of his contemporaries for reviving Plato, and Bekker appears to have followed this trope when he dedicated his critical edition of Plato to his friend Schleiermacher: "To Friedrich Schleiermacher, the reviver of Plato."[20] Thus, although Bekker casts Schleiermacher in a role similar to Ficino's as the reviver of Plato, he still chose to publish Ficino's Latin, not Schleiermacher's German.

Concluding Remarks

Although there were various traditions of Platonism, when asking the question "Who speaks for Plato?" in the Renaissance and in early modern Europe, most

often the answer is simply Ficino, Plato's Latin translator and interpreter: his Renaissance persona. If Schleiermacher was not the first to engage with the "Platonic question," his response is indeed modern, insofar as he tries to free his text from the barnacles and crustaceans of ancient paratexts, biographies, pseudepigrapha, scholia, and commentaries. Nevertheless, Schleiermacher did not stand alone at the gates of the modern interpretation of Plato. While he scraped away biographies and scholia from the pages of his Plato translation, he studied and kept some of their material in his endnotes. His contemporaries and near contemporaries were also busy collating and dissecting this material. Plato's biography and Platonic scholia were no longer read solely as guides to Plato's dialogues; they also became a separate object of study, which was never completely detached from the dialogues but indexed at a distance. In other words, if they were no longer phenomenologically tied to the page of Plato's text, they were often bound with it or housed not too far away on scholarly bookshelves.[21]

When one compares the interpretive framework for the first full Latin translation of Plato with the first successful and near-complete German translation one notices a diachronic unfolding of ancient commentary traditions in Ficino's edition, while in Schleiermacher's one finds instead a short-circuited tradition in the form of a synchronic association of German and classical Greek philosophy. Yet Schleiermacher cannot escape the older traditions altogether, and as Gadamer explains, the attempt to dissolve the hermeneutic circle between interpreter and author "came to its logical culmination in Schleiermacher's theory of the divinatory act, by means of which one places oneself entirely within the writer's mind and from there resolves all that is strange and alien about the text."[22] However dissimilar, the hermeneutics of these two decisive figures in the long history of Platonic interpretation both presuppose divinatory congeniality (a communion of minds or ingenia) as a means to reach Plato. Ficino, however, is willing to tread where Schleiermacher does not by seeking pathways through similar communions with interpretative traditions.

After Schleiermacher's response to the Platonic question, one frequently hears Plato speaking the language of modern—often eighteenth-and nineteenth-century German—philosophy. Interestingly, however, Ficino's voice is not silenced completely in the nineteenth century, since two traditions emerge for the study of Plato. On the one hand, there is the Plato read by the greater public. On the other, there is the Greek Plato read by philologists. Ficino's Latin had competitors and critics in the sixteenth century, but the only Greek editions of Plato's complete works published in Germany between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (1602 Frankfurt and 1781–87 *Bipontina*) also printed Fici-

no's Latin.[23] In the nineteenth century, Ficino's Latin continued to be published along with the Greek text of various editions.[24] Latin was certainly still the language of international scholarship in the nineteenth century, and Ficino was therefore still employed as Plato's translator or spokesperson—that is, Plato still spoke at times in persona Ficini, at least among certain philologists. And if one takes the time to read the notes to Schleiermacher's translation of the Platonic corpus, one will notice that at times the German theologian engaged with, critiqued, and quoted the Florentine philosopher precisely in this manner.

Ficino's Plato stands between Augustine's and Schleiermacher's. Whether in his explicitly pagan Socrates in the *De amore* or his prophetically Christian Plato in the *Laws*, Ficino is clearly indebted to Augustine's hermeneutical framework, just as he also rejects much of Augustine's criticism of later Platonic philosophers. That said, it would be inaccurate to characterize Ficino as anti-Augustinian, insofar as Ficino does not write directly against Augustine. Much of what he writes is certainly un-Augustinian, but much is also hyper-Augustinian. I say hyper-Augustinian specifically for two reasons: first, insofar as the Platonic tendencies latent in Augustine's theology inspire and drive much of Ficino's work on Plato and late ancient Neoplatonists and, second, insofar as Ficino goes far beyond Augustine's prescribed boundaries for orthodoxy—most often concerning questions of mediation between man and the divine. This is apparent in Ficino's treatment of Augustinian hermeneutics in the preface to his *Platonic Theology*:

> So anyone who reads very carefully the works of Plato that I translated in their entirety into Latin some time ago will discover among many other matters two of utmost importance: the worship of God with piety and understanding, and the divinity of souls. On these depend our whole perception of the world, the way we lead our lives, and all our happiness. Indeed, it was because of these views that Aurelius Augustine chose Plato out of the ranks of the philosophers to be his model, as being closest of all to the Christian truth. With just a few changes, he maintained, the Platonists would be Christians. Relying on Augustine's authority, and moved by an immense love for humanity, I long ago decided that I would try to paint a portrait of Plato as close as possible to the Christian truth.[25]

It is easy to think that Ficino might have had his divinatory readings of *Laws* 716c and *Epinomis* 986c in mind when he wrote about his Augustinian motiva-

tions in this preface. On occasions like these, Ficino's hyper-Augustinian interpretations of Plato become un-Augustinian. Augustine explicitly drew the line of orthodoxy over the fact that one cannot find Christ in Platonism. He warned of the danger of the Platonists: they can ensnare believers precisely because they resemble Christianity. Christian mediation and even the transfiguration seem to be in the back of Ficino's reflections on godlike philosophers, whether discussing Socrates' transfiguration as Eros, the Pythagorean way of life, striving to the One by way of mathematics and dialectic, the *primus philosophus* Plato, Plotinus's apophatism, henosis, and glowing face, and even Paul's rapture. He goes beyond Augustine's limits on all these counts. In Ficino's thinking, the Christian religion does not possess the sole and exclusive way to mediate between man and the divine.

As a final case in point, in a letter to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola deliberately inspired by Augustine "on how philosophical minds can come to Christ through Plato," Ficino praises the Platonists as fishermen of men. He is pleased to learn that Pico "is persuading many to follow the pious teachings of our Plato about God and the soul." Filling his letter with obvious references from the Gospels to Jesus's conversion of his apostles into fishermen of souls and to Augustine's account of how the books of the Platonists helped him in his conversion, he writes to Giovanni Pico that he is pleased that Pico is using the nets of Plato's "middle way" to ensnare the impious Epicureans and Averroists in order to convert them to Platonic theology. "But now the net of our Mirandola is Platonic reasoning, which if it is dragged in a solemn manner under Christian truth is not broken, but remains untorn while full."[26] In a passage that would ripple into the pages of Augustine's *Confessions*, Plotinus too compares the presence of the Soul's reasons or logoi in the universe to a living net immersed in the waters of a immeasurably vast sea that spreads its reach with ever expanding waters. Augustine feared that he was almost swept away from the solid grounds of Christian piety by the books of the Platonists.[27] In this letter to Pico, it is almost as though Ficino is employing Augustine's Christian arguments to convert his readers to Platonism instead of vice versa. In the passage from the preface of his *Platonic Theology* to Lorenzo de' Medici that I have just quoted, he even goes so far as to say that Augustine imitated Plato, just as he had formerly written to Cosimo de' Medici that Plato imitated Pythagoras above all. Thus in Ficino's hands Augustine's texts also become Platonic nets to fish out the Platonists from their former ancient oblivion.

Ficino realizes that some of the most influential Christian authorities employ Platonic arguments. Augustine's illuminationism has its roots in Pla-

tonism, ultimately deriving from Plato's account of the light of the Good in *Republic* 6. Similarly, Aquinas's virtue ethics owes a great deal to Neoplatonic theories—mediated through Macrobius—on the hierarchy of virtues. Ficino might have been inspired by Augustine's illuminationism and Aquinas's virtue ethics, but his thinking on noetic light and virtues is much more overtly Platonic than Augustinian or Thomistic. When he studies Pseudo-Dionysius's explicit use of the Neoplatonic triad being-life-intellect, he carefully differentiates how Pseudo-Dionysius, Plotinus, Proclus, and the rest employ the triad in their philosophies. Despite the close similarities between Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus, he accurately explains that unlike Proclus, who took each term in the triad as a different hypostasis, Pseudo-Dionysius is much closer to Plotinus on this point, insofar as Plotinus understands each term in the triad as different attributes of a single hypostasis, the Intellect.[28] Ficino, in short, takes note of the Platonic rivers, like the writings of Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius, as well smaller rivulets that are exposed at the surface of his Christian society in order to find their sources in the cavernous and vast aquifers of ancient Platonism. In his mind, his interpretation, printing, and widespread dissemination of Plato's corpus provided his contemporaries with deep wells to tap into this universal source.

These various comparisons help isolate what is particularly different about how Plato is received and interpreted in late ancient Hippo, Renaissance Florence, and Romantic Halle and Berlin (and indirectly also in modern Plato scholarship). Nevertheless, in making such an interpretive overlay the reader also profits from unexpected if sometimes minor similarities in hermeneutic horizons. Ficino's Plato must have exploded onto the scene of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Europe, but bright stars risk burning out fast. Almost immediately, some resisted the aftershocks of Ficino's Plato. Like the controversies surrounding Ficino's portrayal of Socrates in the *De amore* and Ficino's arguments in the *De vita*, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's dogmatic rejection of these ancient traditions of philosophy to defend his own Christianity clearly demonstrates that Ficino's use of various late ancient Platonic traditions was criticized almost as soon as he revived them.[29] Although Ficino was one of the first readers of Sextus Empiricus in the quattrocento (his other notable humanist readers were Filelfo and Poliziano), the evidence seems to indicate that he turned to him only occasionally.[30] In fact, neither Academic nor Pyrrhonist skepticism would have served Ficino's stated Platonic goals very well. Yet in the hands of later Renaissance thinkers the arguments of the skeptics helped critique Ficino's Platonism. For Gianfrancesco Pico, they help him

mount a dogmatic attack on pagan philosophy to defend the Christian faith in his *Examen vanitatis*. For Montaigne (1533–92), they help him appreciate reason's aporetic nature vis-à-vis ancient philosophy and Christianity in his *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*. Despite their different conclusions, what is common to both Gianfrancesco Pico and Montaigne is that when they critique Plato in their respective works they interpret Plato in Ficino's terms. That is, in the epigraphs quoted at the start of this chapter, both Gianfrancesco Pico and Montaigne understand Plato's corpus according to prosopopoeia, and they specifically follow Ficino's explanation that Plato speaks in his own persona in the *Laws*. Much of Ficino's interpretation of Plato withstood competing claims in early modern Europe, but by Schleiermacher's day, much was also beginning to be ignored or forgotten. Yet even then Schleiermacher's later assault on traditions of late ancient Platonism is but a subsequent iteration of similar religious concerns, which ultimately have their origins primarily in Augustine but also in other church fathers and theologians, who aim at isolating Christianity from any Platonic contaminations. Schleiermacher's accusation that the Neoplatonists are Orientalizing Platonists reveals this very concern. Indeed, so much of the long history of Platonic interpretation is colored by religious apologetics. Still Schleiermacher felt the need to argue against not just the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato but also traditions of prosopopoeic interpretations of the corpus that Ficino had advocated, which shows just how long aspects of Ficino's approach lasted. Nonetheless, Ficino's Latin translations were still printed and remained in circulation well over three hundred years after his 1484 and 1491 editions, revealing a distant and persistent afterglow of his Plato in the works of nineteenth-century classicists and philosophers.

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APPENDIX

Heuristic Prosopography of Ficino's Pythagoreans

The appendix lists the number of pages where a Pythagorean is explicitly mentioned by name in Ficino's *Opera omnia*. This is a tentative count that does not differentiate between one or many mentions of a Pythagorean on a single page. Nor does it take into account the high frequency of occurrences when Ficino simply refers to anonymous "Pythagoreans." It is based on *Marsilio Ficino: Index nominum et index geographicus*, ed. Dorothea Gall et al. (Hildesheim: Olms, 2003).

Before or Contemporaneous with Plato

Aglaophamus	12
Alcmaeon of Croton	4
Archidamus	2
Archytas	19
Brotinus	2
Damon of Syracuse	2
Eurytus	2
Heraclides Ponticus	3
Hipparchus	4
Hippasus	1
Lamiskos of Tarentum	2
Lysis of Tarentum	2
Melissus of Samos	25

Milo of Croton	1
Parmenides	97
Philolaos	13
Pythagoras	133
Pythias of Syracuse	2
Theages	9
Timaeus of Locris	86
Zalmoxis	4
Zeno	3

After Plato

Apollonius of Tyana	22
Damis of Nineveh	4
Numenius of Apameia	20
Philostratus	7
Sextus (Xistus / Xystus)	2
Theon of Smyrna	2

Other *Prisci* for Comparison

Hermes	117
Orpheus	148
Zoroaster	83

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

Notes to epigraphs: Corsi, *Vita Marsilii Ficini*, in the edition published as Appendix I by Marcel (1958: 685, 680–88). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. I use standard *Oxford Classical Dictionary* abbreviations for works when available.

Ficino 1576: 1: 763 = [facsimile 2000].

1. I am currently editing his translations of Iamblichus's *De sect. Pyth.* and Theon's *Math.* for publication.

2. See Robichaud 2016a.

3. Ficino, *Platonic Theology* 2001–6: 1: viii.

4. Two useful sources—one long, one short—for a general overview of the rediscovery of Plato and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance are Hankins 1990a and Celenza 2007.

5. Ficino worked primarily with MSS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 59.01 and 85.09. The third manuscript containing the complete Platonic corpus is MS. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Gr. 184=326. As scholars have documented, Ficino studied previous humanist translations of individual works of Plato when available. In the note "to the reader" of the prefatory material of his 1484 Plato (f. 7r) Ficino also recognized a few humanists who served as editors of his work: Demetrius Chalcondylas, Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, Giovanni Battista Buoninsegni, Angelo Poliziano, Christoforo Landino, and Bartolomeo Scala. See Kristeller 1937-45: 2: 105 and Hankins 1990a: 1: 310-11. For the date of first printed edition of Plato see Kristeller 1978.

6. Kristeller 1984–96: 1: 193, first published as Kristeller 1938.

7. See also Kristeller 1936; Marcel 1958: 15–25.

8. Corsi, *Vita Marsilii Ficini*, in Marcel 1958: 680.

9. On Ficino's *De vita Platonis*, see Robichaud 2006, and the literature cited therein.

10. On the parallels between painting and rhetorical description see Baxendall 1971: 1–120.

11. The poem is published by Kristeller (1937–45: 2: 107). The Byzantine Georgius Gemistus, known as Pletho, had also developed the reputation of being another Plato. In his 1492 preface to his translation of Plotinus's *Enn.,* Ficino characterizes Pletho as "quasi Platonem alterum" (*Prooemium* to Plotinus 1580 = [facsimile 2008]).

12. MS. London. British Library, Harl. 3482, f. 4r. For this image along with other images of Ficino, see Kristeller 1986: 195–96. Saenger (1982) and Chartier (1992: 60–61) have written on the transformation, beginning in the thirteenth century, in illuminations of authors as dictators into authors as writers. Copyists are no longer seen taking down dictation, but silently copying. In their place, illuminations often depict authors writing down their own works. These illustrations show changes in writing cultures and demonstrate, they argue, the emergence of the identity of the author (to be more precise, often of the singular author). On authorship before print see also Hobbins 2009.

13. On the visual depiction of the book and its significance for textual cultures see Petrucci 1995: 19–42.

14. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 82.10, ff. 2v–3r.

15. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 82.15, f. 1r. The text of the letter is also found in Ficino 1576: 1: 905–6; 2: 1968.

16. See, for instance, Plotinus, *Enn.* 4.8.4; 5.1.1.

17. Celenza (2004: 58–79) has argued for the need of a microhistory of intellectuals to adequately understand the extrainstitutional milieu in which Renaissance humanists operated. On the intellectual life of humanists now see also Celenza 2017.

18. Ficino 1576: 1: 906.

19. For a discussion of this episode see D'Elia 2009.

20. Ficino 1576: 1: 883.

21. On Ficino and orthodoxy see Kraye 2002; Celenza 2004: 100–114; Allen 2008c; and Robichaud 2017a, where I argue that Ficino's unorthodoxy in the third and most controversial book of his *De vita* is chiefly due to his Neoplatonism.

22. Plato, *Tht.* 176a–c. The related concepts—divinization, deification, assimilation to the divine, and becoming like God—are central to various Platonic traditions. Accordingly, the literature on the topic is quite large, and I cite the appropriate scholarship throughout this book as it pertains to my specific discussion.

23. Ficino 1576: 1: 883.

24. Plato, *Phdr.* 275d–e; *Ep.* 314a–d; 341b–42b.

25. Ficino 1576: 1: 883–84.

26. On *figura*, the best introduction is still Auerbach 1984: 11–76.

27. See, for instance, the numerous references in Augustine, *De civ. D.* 8–10; and *Conf.* 7.9.

28. Ficino 1576: 1: 607.

29. Ficino, *Commentarium in Phedrum*, 212, trans. Allen 1981a.

30. Plotinus, *Enn.* 3.2.15.

31. Ibid., 1.6.9; see also Allen 2008a.

32. I discuss Ficino and Schleiermacher again in the Conclusion. I also elaborate on this argument elsewhere (2016c), explaining how Ficino and the early modern traditions of Latin translations of Plato affected Schleiermacher's own work. On Ficino and Schleiermacher see also Hankins 2016.

33. For a current and influential developmental approach see Vlastos 1991.

34. See n. 17 in Chapter 5 for a survey of modern interpretations of the *Laws*.

35. Annas (1999: 1–7) has made a similar case for studying Platonic traditions, specifically the Middle Platonists' understanding of Plato's ethics.

36. Catana 2005.

37. Celenza 2001b; 2002; 2012.

38. A brief note on terminology: I employ such categories of periodization as Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic without aiming to convey any particular assumption about a philosopher's Platonism. In fact, as is now known in the wake of Brucker and others, it is often the same scholars who discarded Renaissance philosophy who also branded these ancient Platonists with these negative and marginalizing terms. Ficino simply calls them Platonists, but he also thinks that Plotinus was avant garde in interpreting Plato's true meaning.

39. Allen (1998: 90) has made a convincing case that Ficino often used Augustine as a guide for an un-Augustinian program to "accommodate the Neoplatonists and above all the sublime Plotinus to Christianity." Allen's comment is a useful signpost for the reader. Wind and Allen have noted how Ficino astutely observes the similarity between certain Neoplatonic doctrines

and Arian formulations of the Trinity: Wind 1968: 241–55; Allen 1984b. More generally on Ficino and Augustine see Heitzman 1935; Garin 1940; Tarabochia Canavero 1973; 1978; Allen 1998: 1–92; Kristeller 1984–96: 1: 368–71; Vasoli 1999: 91–112, and Levi 2002.

40. Augustine, *De doct. Chr.* 2.60–63.

41. See, for instance, Augustine, *Conf.* 7.20.26.

42. The literature on the *Liber de causis* is too vast to cite in detail. I limit it to a few studies: Endress 1973; Taylor 1983; 1986; 1989; de Libera 1990; 1992; D'Ancona 1995, and Calma 2016, which assembles a number of recent studies that define the present state of the field. For an overview of the Latin tradition of Platonism see Henry 1934, Hadot 1968, and Gersh 1986, and Gersh and Hoenen 2002. For the relationship between Ficino and traditions of Proclus's *El. Th.* and *El. Ph.* in the Middle Ages see Robichaud 2016a; Robichaud and Soranzo 2017, as well as n. 4 in the Conclusion.

43. Robichaud 2016a; Robichaud and Soranzo 2017.

44. Robichaud 2016a; Robichaud and Soranzo 2017.

CHAPTER 1. PROSOPON/PERSONA

Note to epigraph: Ficino 1576: 1: 889.

1. See for example, Marsh's (1980: 15) comment that Ficino's systematic philosophy "had little use for the dialogue form." Marsh makes a similar point regarding Poliziano's philology (1980: 5). Scholars have sometimes attempted to pigeonhole Ficino as a systematic metaphysician and to detach him from humanist philology and rhetoric. To be sure, neither Ficino nor Poliziano wrote Ciceronian dialogues—dialogues that end in an aporetic conclusion *in utramque partem*.

2. Plato, *Phd.* 77e–78a.

3. Charles Dempsey (2001) does not discuss the Platonic origins and connotations of the masked putto, but he does offer a superb study of this figure. See also Leuschner 1997.

4. It would seem that another common Latin word used for speech, *os*, confirms Frontisi-Ducroux's argument (1995: 37–38) that the Latin etymology for face differentiates itself from the Greek word by not deriving from a visual origin. Since *os* means both mouth and face, it derives from an auditory and phonetic origin. On the association of *persona* with *per-sonare* see Aul. Gell. 5.7.

5. On masks, faces, and personae in antiquity see von Carosfeld 1933; Mauss 1938; Nédoncelle 1948; Schlossmann 1968. See also Mauss 1950: 331–62; Vernant 1965: esp. 265–82; 1973; Meyerson 1973; Detienne 1973; Hadot 1973; Carrithers et al. 1985; Momigliano 1985; Korshak 1987; Frontisi-Ducroux 1991; 1995; Navaud 2011; and Guérin 2009–11.

6. "Persona vero dicta est a personando . . . idcirco autem a sono, quia concavitate ipsa maior necesse est voluatur sonus. Graeci quoque has personas πρόσωπα vocant ab eo quod ponantur in facie atque ante oculos obtegant vultum: παρὰ τοῦ πρὸς ὤπας τίθεσθαι." Boethius, *De duabus naturis et una persona Jesu Christi, contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 1847: cols. 1343–44.

7. The passages to which Plato objects are: *Od.* 17.483–87; *Od.* 4.351; *Il.* 2.1–34.

8. The passage in question is *Od.* 4.456. Plato, *Resp.* 381b–e, trans. Shorey 1996.

9. Plato, *Resp.* 393c.

10. Ibid., 396c–98c.

11. Plato, *Grg.* 485a–86b, trans. Woodhead 1996.

12. Plato, *Ap.* 28b–e.

13. Plato, *Grg.* 526c. Plato seems to be reworking Euripides' *Antiope*, specifically fragment 15 (193 N^2). See Nightingale 1992. The clear antonym of πολυπραγμοσύνη is ἀπραγμοσύνη, and as

Ehrenberg notes (1947: 46), there is nothing in between. The word πραγμοσύνη does not exist. On πολυπραγμοσύνη, Platonism, and Poliziano see Robichaud 2010.

14. See, for instance, Ficino, *De vita* 2002a: 400.

15. Plato, *Symp.* 198b–c, trans. Lamb 2002.

16. Plato, *Soph.* 263e–64b, trans. Cornford 1996.

17. Plato, *Tht.* 189e.

18. Ibid., 143e–44e, trans. Cornford 1996. Some have speculated that Theaetetus stands in as the "Younger Socrates" for Plato. See Thesleff 2000: 56–57; Jatakari 1990.

19. Plato, *Tht.* 209b–d.

20. Nietzsche 1889: 2.3.

21. Plato, *Resp.* 515b; see Frontisi-Ducroux 1995: 25.

22. Plato, *Ti.* 45a, trans. Lee 1965.

23. Plato, *Alc.* 130e. Frontisi-Ducroux is again relevant (1995: 29–30).

24. Gadamer (2004) explains a similar phenomenon of understanding as a fusion of horizons.

25. On the soul as a principle of motion see Plato, *Phdr.* 245c, and Plotinus, *Enn.* 3.7. In *De an.* Aristotle explicitly rejects Plato's idea that the soul is a principle of motion, yet in a way he can be seen as continuing Plato's inquiries into whether there is a part of the soul that is nondiscursive, especially in *De an.* 3.4–5 where he investigates whether a nondiscursive part of the intellect is actual, immortal, and eternal. Even if the controversies that surrounded this passage are often understood as problems autonomous to Peripatetic philosophy (delving into what is often called the active intellect and its abilities to grasp first principles), one can see broadly how it speaks to Plato's line of questioning.

26. Plato, *Grg.* 464b–66a.

27. Aristotle, *Rh.* 1354a1, trans. Freese 1947. I have slightly modified the translation.

28. Ibid.: 1355a–b.

29. Ibid.: 1356a4.

30. The broad strokes of this historical sketch can be found in a recent work by Guérin (2009–11), where he documents the emergence of the discursive persona in Roman rhetoric. On the performative nature of Ciceronian rhetoric see also Krostenko 2001 and Dugan 2005.

31. Cicero, *Fam.* 1.9.23.

32. Cicero, *Off.* 1.107–41.

33. Quoted from Witt 2003: 340.

34. For Renaissance rhetoric, imitation, and Ciceronianism see Sabbadini 1885; Norden 1898; Scott 1920; Santangelo 1954; Kristeller 1961; Gray 1963; Fumaroli 1980; Greene 1982; Tavoni 1984; D'Amico 1984; 1993; Mouchel 1990; McLaughlin 1995; Bembo and Gianfrancesco Pico 1996; Monfasani 1999; Robert 2004; 2011; Celenza, 2005; 2009; as well as the essays contained in both volumes of Cox and Ward 2006; van Deusen 2013. Most recently Baker (2015) has argued that eloquence—not virtue, human dignity, secularism, or other concepts often ascribed to Renaissance humanism—was the criterion par excellence with which humanists judged their own self-worth. The first stage in attaining this humanist goal was perfecting Cicero's Latin.

35. Their epistolary exchange took place between 1485 and 1491. On this exchange see Sabbadini 1885: 32–46; McLaughlin 1995: 187–228; DellaNeva and Duvick 2007; Celenza 2009.

36. Poliziano to Cortesi, 1.1, ed. DellaNeva and trans. Duvick 2007.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Cicero, *Brut.* 293, trans. Hendrickson 1939.

40. Ibid., 295–96.

41. Ibid., 298–99.

42. Poliziano to Cortesi, 1.3, ed. DellaNeva and trans. Duvick 2007.

43. Cortesi to Poliziano in ibid.: 2.2.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., 2.3.

46. Poliziano to Cortesi in ibid.: 1.1.

47. Cortesi to Poliziano in ibid.: 2.5. I have slightly modified the translation.

48. Poliziano to Piero de' Medici, 6, trans. Butler 2006. The term *tergiversari* is especially attested in the writings of Cicero: *Tusc*. 3.18.41; 5.28.81; *Att*. 7.1.4; 7.12.3; 16.5.3; *QRosc*. 13.37; and *Off*. 3.33.118.

49. See Farris 1972; Celenza 2009: 210–12.

50. On this epistolary exchange see McLaughlin 1995: 228–50; Bausi 1996; 1998, which contains Bausi's edition of Barbaro and Pico's epistolary exchange. The literature on Giovanni Pico is vast. For recent publications see Pico della Mirandola 2012; on Giovanni Pico's letters see especially Borghesi 2004a; 2004b; and Copenhaver 2001.

51. Bausi, ed., 1998: 68.

52. On Barbaro's style see especially Bausi 1996.

53. On the distinction between *grammaticus* and *grammatista* see Celenza 2010: 40–41; on the connections between Poliziano's *Lamia* and the Pico-Barbaro exchange see Candido 2010 and Bausi, ed., 1998: 135.

54. Bausi, ed., 1998: 62. Bausi (ibid.: 5–7) also points out the allusions to *Resp*.

55. Plato employs this trope, notably in *Grg*., *Ap*. and *Tht*.

56. Bausi, ed., 1998: 40–42.

57. Ibid.: 42.

58. On Gianfrancesco Pico's epistolary exchange with Pietro Bembo see Sabbadini 1885: 46–50; Santangelo 1954; McLaughlin 1995: 249–75; Bembo and Gianfrancesco Pico 1996; DellaNeva and Duvick 2007.

59. Gianfrancesco Pico to Bembo, 3.12, ed. DellaNeva and trans. Duvick 2007.

60. Ibid., 3.16.

61. Bembo to Gianfrancesco Pico in ibid., 4.5–6.

62. Ibid., 4.4.

63. Plutarch, *Quom. adul. ab am. inter*. 9; as DellaNeva and Duvick have noted (2007: 243), Erasmus employs these figures in his *Ciceronianus*.

64. Gianfrancesco Pico to Bembo, 3.12., ed. DellaNeva and trans. Duvick 2007.

65. Bembo to Gianfrancesco Pico in ibid.: 4.15.

66. Ibid., 4.17.

67. Gianfrancesco Pico to Bembo in ibid.: 5.22.

68. "Mortuaria glossaria" is a misquotation from Aul. Gell. 18.7.3, which Gianfrancesco Pico would have known from his uncle's letter to Barbaro. Bausi, ed., 1998: 58.

69. Gianfrancesco Pico to Bembo, 5.19, ed. DellaNeva and trans. Duvick 2007. I have slightly modified the translation.

70. Gianfrancesco Pico to Bembo in ibid., 5.6, quotes Cicero, *Orat*. 1.2.

71. Cortesi to Poliziano in ibid., 2.2; Celenza 2004: 85–8; 2009: 204–5.

72. Celenza's point that humanism was involved with philosophy outside the university should not be forgotten when thinking of the permutations of humanist *disputatio*. Humanists were certainly aware of medieval disputatio, which by the fifteenth century was a formalized argumentative method of scholastic classrooms, but their revivals of various types of dialogue and of ancient forms of rhetorical and public epistles shifted their disputation outside the university.

In both iterations, nonetheless, disputatio retains its nature as discursive reasoning. For a recent history of medieval disputatio see Novikoff 2012; 2013. See also Celenza 2004: 85–86; 2009: 204–5. Among the many works on the Renaissance dialogue see Marsh 1980; Cox 1992; Heitsch and Vallée 2004; Baumann et al. 2015.

73. DellaNeva and Duvick 2007: 4.1, 4.33, 5.4, 5.27.

74. See nn. 1 and 34 above.

75. Erasmus 1693: 155–57.

76. For Ficino's letters see Ficino 1990–2010; Toussaint's introduction to Ficino 1495 [facsimile 2011]. There is also an English translation of the first eleven books of Ficino's letters with useful notes: Ficino: 1975–2015.

77. On Ficino's scholastic education see Kristeller 1944a; now in Kristeller 1984–96: 1: 35–97; and Robichaud 2016a. On Ficino's humanistic education see Hankins 1990a: 1: 269–71. On his education in general see Marcel 1958: 161–97; Field 1988: 129–201; Hankins 1990a: 1: 269–78.

78. On quattrocento humanism and the debates on Latin's artificial or native nature see Celenza 2009.

79. Ficino 1576: 1302. On the confusion of this terminology in the Middle Ages see Michaud-Quantin 1969. On the presence of this confusion already in the late ancient Greek commentators, see Hadot 1979; 1990: 187–88. For further discussion on this topic, with special attention to Poliziano and dialectic, see Robichaud 2010: 177–85.

80. In general, Stoic logic is one of the three integral parts of philosophy (along with physics and ethics), and unlike vaulted Platonic dialectic it is principally concerned with language and propositions. Aristotle does not speak of logic per se but rather of demonstration, analytic, and dialectic. His methods are applied to propositions and also reject dialectic's claim to being the supreme part of philosophy. Unlike the Stoics, however, many Peripatetics understand Aristotle to mean that logic is an external tool (*organon*) for philosophy. But both follow Plato in retaining its coupling with rhetoric. Most important, dialectic and rhetoric must be distinguished from sophistry.

81. Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.3.4.

82. Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* 2012a: 2: 58–60 (58.1). Ficino there analyzes the immensely important Neoplatonic triad of being-life-intellect, a preoccupation of many of his other writings on Plato, Plotinus, and Ps.-Dionysius. See Robichaud 2016a. On the triad (and its relationship to remaining, procession, and reversion) see Chapter 2 n. 62.

83. Vanhaelen has pointed out similarities between this passage and Lorenzo Valla's in Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* 2012a: 1: xxxiv.

84. Proclus, *In Parm.* 6.1107.8–16, trans. Morrow and Dillon 1987. For Moerbeke's translation: Proclus 1982: 2: 390.

85. On Ficino's teaching see Field 1988; 2002; Hankins 1991.

86. Ficino on occasion employs Ciceronian tropes, for example, Ficino 1576: 1: 668–70; Rees (2013: 141–62) has made the case for a more general influence of Cicero on Ficino. See also Hankins 1990a: 1: 269–71.

87. Corsi, *Vita Marsilii Ficini*, in Marcel 1958: 681. See Petrarch's letters to Lapo da Castiglionchio (1 April 1352) and to Sygeros (10 January 1354), and Machiavelli's letter to Vettori (10 December 1513).

88. Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 104.

89. Ficino 1576: 2: 1129.

90. Cicero, *De or.* 2.193–95.

91. On Ficino's adoption of the role of the *vates* or divinatory philologist while editing Plotinus's *Enn*. see Robichaud 2017b.

92. See n. 6 above.

93. Ficino 1576: 1: 631 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 87).

94. Ibid., 1: 626, incorrectly paginated as 636 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 71–72). There is also an ancient tradition that Socrates would tell youth to examine their virtues and vices while they look at themselves in the mirror: Diog. Laert. 2.33; Plutarch, *Conjug.* 141a; Apuleius, *Apol*. 15. See also Vergerio in Kallendorf 2002: 13.

95. Ficino 1576: 1: 631 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 87).

96. Ibid.: 1: 626, incorrectly paginated as 636 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 73).

97. Ficino (ibid.: 1: 723–24) refers to the Old Testament, Hebrew prophets, Mercurius, Gorgias, Isocrates, Herodotus, Cicero, Livy, Apuleius, Jerome, and Boethius as ancient authorities who at least on occasion employed prosimetrum. The references to Plato's style that Ficino cites are Diog. Laert. 3.37; Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.81; Cicero, *Br.* 31.121. See also Cicero, *Or.* 19.67, for Plato's poetic language.

98. Ficino 1576: 1: 724.

99. Ibid., 1: 639 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 119).

100. Ibid., 1: 638–39 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 118).

101. Ibid., 1: 638 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 117).

102. Ibid., 1: 857.

103. Ficino 1576: 2: 1013 (Ficino 2015: 1: *On the Mystical Theology*: 2–5 (2). See Allen's prefatory remarks on Pseudo-Dionysius's style in idem xxv–xxvii and 1998: 189. I thank Allen for encouraging me to address Ficino's remarks on Pseudo-Dionysius's style here.

104. On Plato's use of dithyrambs and the *Phdr.* see Diog. Laert. 3. 5; Olympiodorus, *VP* 55–80; ibid., *In Alcib*. 2.64; Apul., *De dog. Plat*. 1.2; Procl., *In R*. 1.205.1–21; *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, 3; Macrob., *Sat*. 2.2.15. Proclus (*Th. Pl.* 2003: 4.23) refers to Syrianus as an inspired Bacchant interpreting Plato.

105. Ficino 1576: 1: 833.

106. Ficino appropriates rhetorical terminology often employed by Renaissance humanists and Ciceronians (e.g., Bruni, Bembo, Pico and many others) to describe the character and fashion of one's style. See Cicero, *De or.* 3.25.95, 3.52.199; *Br.* 46.17; Quintilian, *Inst*. 12.10.71; 6.3.110; 9.4.17.

107. See, for instance, MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 90 sup. 43 f. 339v.

108. Ficino 1576: 1: 859.

109. Ibid., 1: 889.

110. See Cicero, *De or.* 1.59.252; 3.26.102; *Att*. 6.1.8; *Or.* 25.83; Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.59.242; 11.1.51; 11.3.10–14.

111. Ficino would return to his and Pico's shared saturnine and melancholic spirits, intellects, or even daemons in his preface to his translation of Plotinus in order to explain their providential role and their communion of ingenii in reviving Platonic studies. See Allen 2010 and Robichaud 2017b.

112. Ficino 1576: 1: 929.

113. Ibid., 1: 925.

114. Aristotle, *De an.* 430a2–5.

115. Ficino 1576: 1: 627 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 75).

116. Ficino's understanding of the inner self is not the Averroist position that all men share a single intellect but, rather like Plotinus, that Intellect is both one and many due to its participation in and emantation from an originative source. Plotinus holds that a non-discursive part of us

remains undescended from the Intellect, which he describes as pan-faced, shining with individual living faces (παμπρόσωπόν τι χρῆμα λάμπον ζῶσι προσώποις, *Enn*. 6.7.15), and which Ficino understands as "vultibus omnibus" or "vultus innumerabiles." The first being, the Intellect, is one-many, not because it is composed of many intellects joined spatially, but because it converts inwards towards the One-Good and becomes boniform. Hence, Ficino explains that one can understand the Intellect (and also oneself) by thinking of it as preserving the forms of the various faces in itself without any physical distance. (Plotinus 1580: 707–8).

117. For the analogy between rays of light and sound (vocalizations, song, voice, prayers, and the like) in Ficino's thinking see Robichaud 2017a.

118. For Ficino's own list of persons in his circle see Ficino 1576: 1: 936–37.

119. Ibid., 1: 936.

120. On this painting see Aikema 1990: 61–62. In addition to the painting in the Prado, there is another very similar painting attributed to Pietro della Vecchia that was formerly in the Contini Bonacossi Collection in Florence. See the reproduction (scheda 59070) in the Fondazione Federico Zeri from the University of Bologna. For other depictions similar to the ones that I have discussed in this chapter see Pier Francesco Mola (1612–66), *Philosopher and Students*, Milan, Castello Sforzesco; Jusepe de Ribera, *Philosopher with Mirror*, London, Christie's (lot 34, 2 July 2013); Giulio Bonasone's illustrations of Socrates in Bocchi 1574: 8 and 126. All of these can be located in the Photographic Collection of the Warburg Institute, London.

121. Sorabji (2008: 25) has an interesting discussion of a similar exchange of glances, a "shared attention" or "joint attention," in Mary Cassatt's *The First Mirror* or *Mother and Child*.

CHAPTER 2. FICINO AND THE PLATONIC CORPUS

Note to epigraphs: Ficino's Preface to his Plato translation for Cosimo de' Medici. MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163, f. 1v. Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 104.

MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163, f. 1v; Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 104. Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary*, 484, trans. Allen 2000.

1. Kristeller remained on the whole consistent with his thesis regarding Ficino's relationship to humanism, as defined famously by him (1961: 11) as "a characteristic phase in what may be called the rhetorical tradition in Western culture" and as an intellectual movement specifically focused on the five *studia humanitatis*: grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy. In a very early article that he published soon after arriving in the United States Kristeller articulated his thesis differentiating humanism from philosophy: "The scholastic tradition persisted because early humanism did not provide a substitute in the form of real philosophy. Humanism was a general movement of great force which had indirect philosophical importance because it was preparing new concepts and problems; it contained religious feelings, political views, moral opinions, and above all a general ideal of education, but no metaphysical ideas or speculative systems. . . . The humanists produced mere literature, not philosophy." In this same essay Kristeller set apart most humanists from Ficino and Pico, whom he characterized as humanists *and* philosophers: "So the intellectual movement of humanism found in Ficino and Pico at last its philosophical expression" (Kristeller 1939: 201–3). In another fairly early introductory volume to Renaissance philosophy, Kristeller wrote about Ficino: "I cannot agree with those historians who want to see in Ficino and Renaissance Platonism nothing but a special sector or phase of humanism; I prefer to consider Renaissance Platonism a distinct movement within the broader context of Renaissance philosophy" (Kristeller 1964: 37–38). Kristeller might very well have had in mind historians who shared some of Garin's perspective on Ficino's relationship to humanism. Later in

his career Kristeller was aware that his thesis on Ficino was sometimes misinterpreted: "I have always insisted that Ficino was not a pure humanist in the sense in which we have defined the term, but I have never denied that among other things he was also a humanist and the humanist learning represented an important aspect of his background." Still, in that same essay, Kristeller reaffirms his understanding of Ficino and the Renaissance, preferring to lift him out of his immediate context and situate him in a different philosophical genealogy: "In my opinion (and perhaps many scholars will not agree with me), apart from Ficino's contributions to many other areas of learning and culture, his greatest significance as a thinker (and also as a scholar) rests on the fact that he constitutes an important member and link (not always recognized) in that golden chain which is the tradition of rational metaphysics that leads from Presocratics and Plato to Kant, Hegel and beyond" (Kristeller 1986: 17, 30). It is not my aim here to question Kristeller's thesis on humanism and philosophy in general or on Ficino's relationship to humanism in particular, it is merely to underscore how certain scholarly categories have emerged that sharply distinguish not only humanism from philosophy but also Ficino the philosopher from Ficino the humanist. As I argued in the previous chapter, Ficino's rhetoric aimed at philosophical purposes. Kristeller's understanding of the Renaissance has been the subject of recent studies: Hankins 2001; Monfasani 2006; Toussaint 2006. Celenza (2004: 16–57) synthesizes many of the essential differences between Kristeller and Garin. For a more recent study, see Rubini 2014: 293–354. While not centered on Ficino, Baker (2015) also comments on Kristeller's thesis. Monfasani just published a new article entitled "Paul Oskar Kristeller and Philosophy" for the *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale* (Monfasani 2016), where among other things he evaluates the degree to which the label Neo-Kantian is in fact an appropriate designation for Kristeller's thinking. I would like to thank him for sending me an advance copy of his draft.

2. The fact that Ficino's rhetoric has been overlooked for so long speaks directly to how deeply ingrained certain traditions in Renaissance and Ficino scholarship truly are.

3. Hankins 1990a: 1: 42. On Bruni's Plato see also ibid., 2: 388–400.

4. Quoted from the dossier of documents assembled in ibid., 2: 532.

5. Ibid., 2: 600.

6. On the comparison of Homer and Plato see my discussion in Robichaud 2010.

7. Pico 1557–73: 1 368–69 = [Facsimile Giovanni and Gianfrancesco Pico 1969].

8. Ficino 1576: 2: 1801.

9. Hankins (1990a: 2: 625–26) has edited the text.

10. On the metaphor of the adytum for textual interpretation see Robichaud 2010 and 2017b.

11. Hankins 1990a: 1: 157–58.

12. Augustine, *De civ. D.* 8.4.

13. Some of the combatants in the arena are Pletho, Gennadius Scholarius, Matthew Camariotes, Theodore Gaza, Michael Apostolis, Andronicus Callistus, Demetrius Chalcondyles, George of Trebizond, and Cardinal Bessarion.

14. On Ficino's limited engagement with the Plato-Aristotle controversy, see Monfasani 2002. On George see above all Monfasani 1976; 1984. For recent studies on Bessarion see Hankins's discussion (1990a: 1: 161–263), as well as Coluccia 2009; Monfasani 2012; Bessarion 2014.

15. George of Trebizond, *Comparatio Platonis et Aristotelis* 1523: 8.

16. Ibid.: 49.

17. Two principal versions of the same letter survive. Variant A (to use Delatte's classification) is included in Iamblichus's *De sect. Pyth.* 75–78, and is also partially quoted by Diogenes Laertius (who indicates that the letter is written to Hippasus) and Clement of Alexandria. Based on the variants it is clear that Bessarion quotes variant B of the letter, which begins with the

author's dismay that the Pythagorean society was torn apart after Pythagoras died, and concludes that Pythagoras entrusted certain ὑπομνήματα (*commentariolos* in the Latin of the *In calumniatorem Platonis*) to his daughter Damo. Some have speculated that this indicates a source for Pythagoras's pseudepigraphic ἱερὸς λόγος, about which Iamblichus has written. (Diog. Laert. 8.24-42; Iamblichus, *VP* 75-8; Clem. Al., *Strom.* 5.57; Bessarion, *In calumniatorem Platonis* 1503: f. 2v. Delatte 1999a: 83-106; Burkert 1961: 17–28.)

18. Bessarion, *In calumniatorem Platonis* 1503: 3r.

19. Ficino 1576: 2: 1129.

20. Ibid.: 1: 766. See also Diog. Laert. 3.37; Cicero, *Brut.* 31.121. On Ficino's *De vita Platonis* see Robichaud 2006.

21. For Proclus's comments on Longinus, Homer, and Platonic style, see Proclus, *In Ti.* 1. 63.21–66.32, 1. 86.1–15, 1. 14.7–15.23, 1. 86.19–26; and Robichaud 2010.

22. On the debate over Hermias's identity and his place in Syrianus's school see Praechter 1912; Moreschini 1992; and Manolea 2014.

23. Plato, *Phdr.* 237a.

24. Ibid.: 243a–44a.

25. Ficino, *Commentarium in Phedrum*, 74–75, trans. Allen 1981a. On Ficino and Hermias see Sheppard 1980; Allen 1980b; Allen and White 1981b.

26. Plato, *Phdr.* 243b.

27. See the discussion in Tarrant 2014. For Hermias's text: Hermiae Alexandrini, *In Phdr.* 1901; Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phdr.* 2012. Allen (1980a) argues for Hermias's limited influence on Ficino.

28. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phdr.*, 76–79.

29. Ficino 1576: 1: 626, 756 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 69–70). Kristeller (1937–45: 1: cxlvi) initially argued that Ficino translated Hermias after 1474, since Ficino does not include it in his catalogue of translations sent to Poliziano (Ficino 1576: 619), but later noted (1966: 52 and nn. 5, 45) Ficino's use of Hermias by 1464 in the *Argumentum in Theagetem*. On these catalogues see Robichaud 2016a: 47–55. Marcel (1958: 605) claims that he translated Hermias as late as 1488. Allen (1980a: esp. 111–12; 1984a: 243; with White 1981b: 39) contends that he completed the translation between 1474 and 1489, while Sheppard (1980) argues that Ficino's knowledge of Hermias dates at least to 1469 because of its traces in the *De amore*. For Allen's discussion on Hermias's (and Iamblichus's) impact on Ficino's *Phdr.* commentary see 1984a: 243–49. Primarily drawing on his study of the *Phdr.*'s text in Ficino's work, Gentile (1990) argues that Ficino translated Hermias before 1464. The letter to Cavalcanti that I discuss earlier in this chapter gives further evidence that Ficino worked on Hermias before 15 October 1468. See my comments later in this chapter and in Chapter 4 about Ficino's early work on Iamblichus's *De sect. Pyth*. Ficino's translation survives in MSS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5953, and Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Philol., 33.

30. As the scholars who have studied the tradition of Plato's manuscripts know, Ficino writes of having received two Greek manuscripts of Plato: one donated by Cosimo de' Medici, the other by Amerigo Benci (Ficino 1576: 1: 609, 2: 1537; Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 88). Ficino's testament describes each codex: the former is "in carta bona cum omnibus dyalogis," the latter "cum certis dyalogis in carta bombycina." Only three extant manuscripts contain the complete Platonic corpus: (*a*) MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Plut. 59.01, (*c*) MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09, and (*E*) MS. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Gr. 184. Manuscript *E* at the Marciana library was owned by Bessarion and was apparently not in Ficino's hands when he translated Plato. As for the two remaining manuscripts at the Laurenziana library that contain the complete corpus, *a* is a codex composed of fifteenth-century paper that was once thought to

have been the volume that Cosimo gave to Ficino (Kristeller 1937–45: 1: cxlvii; 1966; Marcel 1958: 254; Sicherl 1962). Drawing on Rizzo's (1984: 24–26) study of the humanist philological lexicon, Gentile remarked that in Ficino's day "carta" could mean both paper and parchment. The addition of "bona" to "carta" in the description of the codex given to Ficino by Cosimo implies that it is valuable or of high quality for writing. In all likelihood, therefore, the manuscript that Cosimo gave to Ficino was composed of parchment and not paper (Gentile et al. 1984: 29–30; 1987: 55). Accordingly, the codex given to Ficino by Cosimo is none other than manuscript *c*. Indeed, Piccolomini (1874) suggests that *c* could be the codex indicated as "universa opera platonis in uno volumine. P[apyrus]" in the purchasing contract of books brought back to Florence for Lorenzo de' Medici by Giano Lascaris in 1492. More recently, Diller (1983: 257) also argued that the codex given to Ficino by Cosimo was *c* and not *a*. Diller, moreover, expressed the opinion that *c* was in fact copied from *a*. This conclusion now seems generally accepted, even if there is still some debate as to when and where the manuscript given to Ficino by Cosimo arrived in Italy or was prepared. After 1492, Ficino did in fact also use *a* along with its apograph, *c*. The volume in "carta bombycina" given to Ficino by Benci still needs to be identified. It is becoming clear that Ficino did not just have these manuscripts of Plato's complete corpus at hand when he was collating the text prior or during his translations. Gentile (1987) offers some indications of Ficino's hand in the manuscript (*o*) MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Conv. Soppr. 180, and Carlini suggested the same for (*i*) MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Conv. Soppr. 54; see also Carlini 2006: 45. Post (1934) argues that *o* is an apograph of *a*, which in turn is a "very accurate copy" of (*O*) MS. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Gr. 1., commonly known as the Vatican Plato. Bekker designated the manuscript with *O* and Burnet with *O*, which was wrongly indicated by Bekker as MS. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 796. Rabe (1908) corrected the mistake. The Vatican Plato was actually in Paris (where it had the shelf mark 796) until 1815, when Angelo Mai brought it to the Vatican. See also Mercati 1952: 58–67; Post 1934: 36–39. *O* in turn is a complementary volume to the famous (*Bodleianus B*) MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Clark 39, which was copied for Arethas, deacon of Patras (895 CE), who annotated it. Although it was once believed to have been copied from the other important Plato manuscript designated commonly by *A*, Post (1928; 1934: 9–14) demonstrated that it is independent from it up to *Leg.* 746c.

31. Just as the translation of Hermias by Ficino helps him define at an early stage his understanding of Socrates' soteriological role and divine inspiration, so his early translation of Iamblichus's *De sect. Pyth*. also oriented the course of his Pythagorean understanding of Plato.

32. Allen's contributions on Ficino's study of individual dialogues are essential: for instance, Ficino 2000; Allen 1981a; 1989; 1994. For a summary of his understanding of Ficino's interpretation of Plato see Allen 1998. On Ficino's hermeneutics see also Hankins 1990a: 1: 300–366. Leinkauf (2014) gives a helpful account of Ficino's use of various forms of commentaries: *annotationes*, *collectanea*, *epitomae*, *argumenta*, and *commentaria*. There have been a number of studies of Ficino and Plato's *Prm*., often addressing the question of Proclus's influence on Ficino (much but not all of which focuses on the *Prm*.): Allen 1982b; 1986; 2014b; Beierwaltes 1985; 2002; Copenhaver 1988; Étienne 1997; Ficino 2012a; 2012b; Gentile 1990; Gentile and Gilly 1999: 76–80; Gersh 2014: 1–29; Hankins 1990a: 2: 429–33; Klibansky 1943: 281–330; Klutstein 1987; Kristeller 1987b, now in Kristeller 1984–96: 4: 115–37; Lazzarin 2003; 2006; Malmsheimer 2001; Megna 2003; 2004; Rabassini 1999; Saffrey 1959, now in Saffrey 2002: 69–94; Sanzotta 2014; Steel 2013; 2014. Robichaud 2016a; 2017a; Robichaud and Soranzo 2017.

33. Pagani (2006; 2009a; 2009b) has put forward evidence that Pletho studied the complete Platonic corpus in depth, and there are indications that he revised Plato's myths to cohere with his own philosophical ideas.

34. Tarrant has written two valuable studies (1993; 2000a) that serve as excellent introductions to the early study of the Platonic corpus.

35. On MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09, see n. 30 above, as well as Bandini 1770: 3: cols. 257–66; Post 1934: 66; Kristeller 1937–45: 1: cxlvii; idem. 1966; Marcel 1958: 254; Sicherl 1962; Wilson 1962: 386–95 (no. 35); Brumbaugh and Wells 1968: 40; Diller 1983: 251–58; Gentile 1987; Gentile et al. 1984: 28–31 (no. 22); Boter 1989: 36–37.

36. See Hankins's assessment (1990a: 1: 328–41).

37. See also Diog. Laert. 3. 38; Olympiodorus, *VP* 55–80 and *In Alc*. 2.63–65; *Anonymous Prolegomena*, ed. Westerink 1962: 3.

38. Ficino 1576: 2: 1351 (*De amore*, 1956: 228).

39. On the *Leg.* as Plato's final dialogue see Allen 2012: 489–90, Robichaud 2014, and Chapter 5 of this book. On Schleiermacher see Allen's brief remarks (1981a: 13). I discuss the comparison with Schleiermacher in more depth in the Conclusion and in my 2016c.

40. I leave the question of Cosimo's supposed role in founding a Platonic Academy to others: see especially della Torre 1902; Field 1988; 2002; Hankins 1990b; 1991; 2002; 2007a; 2011a; Monfasani 2011.

41. Ficino 1576: 1: 608 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 6). See Gentile's remarks in ibid.: 1: ccxlviii. Even if Cosimo's letter was written by Ficino himself, it would only reinforce my present argument to show how much the question of the goal of Platonism—qua happiness and assimilating to God—preoccupied Ficino (Ficino 1576: 1: 608). See also Allen's account in the introduction to Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary* 2000.

42. Ficino 1576: 1: 608 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 9–10).

43. Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 243; Kristeller 1937–45: 1: 37. Ficino later writes in the preface to his *Commentaria Platonis* to Lorenzo de' Medici that after he completed ten dialogues for Cosimo he translated nine more for Pietro (Ficino 1576: 2: 1129).

44. Ficino 1576: 2: 1965.

45. MSS. Oxford, Bodleian Canon. Class. Lat., 163; Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Carteggio di Lucca, cass. 5; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Nouv. acq. lat. 1633. Kristeller 1937–45: 1: cli–clii; idem. 1966.

46. On the astrological reasons behind some of Ficino's publishing see Hankins 1990a: 1: 300–304; Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: xxxv–xlii. On astrology and Ficino's divinatory philology see Robichaud 2017b. On Ficino, astrology, and the Golden Age see also Allen 1994: 106–42.

47. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09. Hankins (1990a: 1: 306–11) proposes a few reasons why Ficino grouped a few of the dialogues into trilogies. On MS. Plut. 85.09 see my nn. 30 and 35 above.

48. Hankins (1990a: 1: 318) has put forward the plausible hypothesis that Ficino probably intended to set his own massive eighteen-volume *Platonic Theology* as a capstone to the whole printing project, and would have included "a system of cross references."

49. For evidence of this project see Kristeller 1937–45: 1: cxvi–cxx. Kristeller there also cites a letter to Martinus Uranius (24 November 1491): Ficino 1576: 1: 929. Allen 1981a: 19–21; Hankins 1990a: 1: 301, 309, 318–21.

50. The evidence is found in Ficino's 1496 *Commentaria in Platonem*, specifically the dedication to Niccolò Valori and the letter to Paolo Orlandini (14 November 1496) with which the edition closes (Ficino 1576: 2: 1136, 1425–26). Allen (1981a: 19–21) discusses the letter to Valori. See also Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary* 2000: 487–89.

51. Kristeller first published the prefatory argumentum in his *Supplementum Ficinianum*. He claimed at the time that Ficino's arrangement not just of the first decade but of all the Platonic dialogues had no signification beyond representing "the chronological sequence in which Ficino

translated them one after another" (Kristeller 1937–45: 1: cxlvii–clvii; 2: 103–5; 1966: 44). Marcel (1958: 273, 258–63) was the first scholar to address the philosophical coherence of the ten complete dialogues. He claimed that Ficino, being in a hurry, arranged the dialogues logically or perhaps even philosophically, since he chained together disparate elements to form a continuum from earthly goods to the highest Good. Kristeller (1966) returned to the problem when discussing the two Paris and Parma fragments of Ficino's draft of the first ten argumenta. He further strengthened his previous claim that Ficino set down the first ten dialogues in the order in which he translated them by also arguing that Ficino chose these particular dialogues because of the ease and novelty of their translation. Nevertheless, Kristeller (1966: 46) then also expressed a minor revision to his previous position: "I suspect Ficino also followed some other unexpressed criteria in his selection." Thus things stood until Allen's detailed study of Ficino's *Phlb.* commentary in 1975, where Allen observed that the *Phlb.* should be considered the culminating point to the order of the first ten translations. Instead of a haphazard selection of dialogues, as Kristeller suggested, Allen rightly understood that Neoplatonic reasons must have been at work behind the scenes of Ficino's organization. He thus also emphasized the close ties between the *Phlb.* and the *Prm.* and even speculated about possible influences on Ficino of Olympiodorus's *In. Phlb.* See Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary* 2000, 3–7. Hankins (1990a: 1: 308–9) also repudiated Kristeller's argument and added to Allen's theory of its Neoplatonic character, explaining that the ten dialogues constitute an ordered corpus that demonstrates a Platonic education from earthly things to the beatific vision, which Hankins believes is clearly Plotinian and Proclean in inspiration. Very recently Toussaint (2013) argued that a psychological analysis of the small corpus shows that Ficino's choice of dialogues is tied to Cosimo and Ficino's own philosophical friendship. Finally, Catana presented a paper at the American Academy in Rome in 2013, which I had the priviledge of hearing, examining whether Ficino's first corpus of ten Platonic dialogues can be understood as a pedagogical curriculum in virtue theory: Catana, "Ficino on the Ordering of Plato's Dialogues: How to Become a Platonic *Persona*" presented at the American Academy in Rome, 13 December 2013, for the conference: *Libraries, Lives and the Organization of Knowledge in the Pre-Modern World*. I gave a lecture later that day at the same conference, entitled "Marsilio Ficino (1433–99) and the *Persona Platonis*."

52. Pointing to Damascius's *In Phlb.* (which Ficino attributed to Olympiodorus), Allen (1977: 165) noted that Ficino changes the skopos of the *Phlb.* to agree with Iamblichus's idea that its theme is the Good.

53. Ficino 1576: 2: 1965.

54. See n. 42 above.

55. Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 104; MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163, f. 1r.

56. Kristeller 1966: 45.

57. See n. 42 above.

58. See n. 42 above.

59. Marcel (1958: 262–63) put forward a hypothesis connecting this material.

60. See n. 42 above. Ficino wrote a series of letters employing some of this material on happiness: Ficino 1576: 1: 608 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 7–10), ibid.: 1: 633 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 97–98), ibid.: 1: 622–65 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 201–10).

61. See, for example, Field 1988: 53–126; Ficino (1576: 2: 1965) speaks of Argyropoulos's translations of Aristotle in the same breath as his own early translations for Cosimo in his preface to Xenocrates for Piero. Allen (Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary* 2000: 6–7) also underscores the pertinence of Aristotle's ethics to Ficino's work for Cosimo.

62. See my discussion of Ficino on this triad in Robichaud 2016a. Its Platonic origins are Plato, *Soph.* 248e. On the triad (and its relationship to remaining, procession, and reversion) see

the essential article by Hadot (1960), and Dodds's notes to prop. 101–2 in Proclus, *El. Th.* 1964: 252–53; Pépin 1956: 39–64, esp. 58–64, as well as Gersh 1973 and 1978.

63. For Iamblichus's Platonic curriculum and the order of the Platonic corpus, see especially the reconstruction and studies by Westerink et al. (1962; 1990). The material about the curriculum from the *Proleg.* is found in chapter 26. See also O'Meara 2007: 61–68.

64. I am grateful to Michael Allen for pointing out the similarities between Ficino's and Iamblichus's understanding of the *Soph.* as a "physical" dialogue.

65. MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163, ff. 65r–66r; Ficino 1576: 2: 1136–37; idem: *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* 2012: 1: 2–9.

66. MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163, f. 1v; Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 104.

67. MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163, f. 1v; Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 104.

68. Proclus, *In Alc.* 11.9–21.

69. See my discussion of prop. 15 from Proclus's *El. Th.* in Robichaud 2016a, as well as Robichaud and Soranzo 2017. Zini (2014) has also written on the importance of Neoplatonic conversion for Ficino.

70. It is also Gentile's (1990) opinion that Ficino translated the *De sect. Pyth.* at this very early time. See also my arguments in Chapter 4 of this book, where I confirm this dating by putting forward corroborative evidence from another manuscript, MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardianus, 70.

71. The same could be said for Ficino's translation of Theon's works. See, for instance, Iamblichus 2006; Théon de Smyrne 2010. Ficino's Latin translations, which I am currently editing, are preserved in MSS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat., 5953 and 4530. There is also an additional copy of the *De sect. Pyth.* and of Theon: MS. Hamburg, Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Philol. 305, which was lost during the Second World War but has since been recovered. Ficino's translation of Hermias's commentary to the *Phdr.* also remains solely in one manuscript.

72. For the scholarship on Ficino and Iamblichus see Sicherl 1957; Copenhaver 1987; Celenza 2001a; 2002; Saffrey and Segonds 2006; Toussaint's introduction to Iamblichus 1497 [facsimile 2007]: i–xvii; Toussaint 2014a and 2014b; Giglioni 2012; Robichaud 2016b; 2017b; and Hankins 2016. On Ficino and Iamblichus, further work needs to be done on Ficino's commentary on Priscianus Lydus's paraphrase of Theophrastus.

73. The most comprehensive study of Iamblichus's *De sect. Pyth.* is O'Meara 2006; see also the literature I cite in Chapter 4 of this book.

74. MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163, f. 1v–2r. Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 104–5.

75. The *Protr.*'s order and aim is evident in Ficino's translation of its table of contents as it is preserved in manuscript MS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5953, f. 11v: "*Exhortatorius ad philosophiam*: Quid principium secundum Pythagoram inductionis in disciplinam et philosophiam, et quomodo communissimum est, et disponens in omnia bona quae sunt circa philosophiam quique ipsius ordo et quod tripliciter dividitur, et quomodo semper procedit in id, quod purius est. C.i; Sententiosae aliter cognitivae assimilationes directivae aliter exhortativae a manifestis omnibus nobis moventes animi promptitudinem aliter aviditatem alacritatemque ad assumendum communiter secundum omnem sectam intellectam virtutem. C. ii; Pythagoricae sententiae directivae aliter exhortativae metricae, in omnem optimam et divinissimam philosophiam provocare potentes. C.iii; Scientifici processus extendentes in inductionem aliter directionem speculativae philosophiae cum traditione disciplinae, quantumque et quale bonum est sapientia, et per quas causas studendum est obsequendumque bene sapientibus. C.iiii;

Pythagoricae inductiones aliter exhortationes multum permutantes provocationes exhortationesque aliorum philosophorum et proprios facientes processus. C.v; Mixtae exhortationes ad virtutem activam et civilem et ad possessionem usumque perfectioris sapientiae secundum intellectum. C.vi; A<p>propriantes aliter propriae provocationes ad speculativam philosophiam et praecipue ad vitam secundum intellectum partim ab ipsam hominis natura: partim a manifestis memorantes commentantesque quid propositum. C.vii." . . . Ab his quae sunt in anima bonis processus in exhortationem utpote quae ad foelicitatem afferendam obtineant principatum: et a virtutibus utpote quae sunt per se sufficientes ad vitam beatam similis provocatio. C.xix. Mixtae suppositiones et documenta exhortationibus communiter discurrentes in omnia bona: et ad omnes philosophiae partes, at ad fines vitae, quibus virtus coniectatur et intenditur. C.xx," which is followed by the concluding exhortations of the *Symbola*.

76. The following is a comparison of Ficino's Latin translations of the Greek terms in the relevant passages of Iamblichus's *Protr.* MS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5953, f. 12v: vitam beatam [τὸν μακάριον βίον; Iamblichus, *Protr.* 1888: 5.27–28] / f. 15v: felicis et beatae vitae [τῆς δαιμονίας καὶ μακαρίας ζωῆς; *Protr.* 15.10] / f. 15v: beatissimae vitae [μακαριωτάτου βίου; *Protr.* 15.14] / f. 21v: beati [εὐδαιμονήσομεν; *Protr.* 32.24–25] / f. 27r: divinum aut beatum [θεῖον ἢ μακάριον; *Protr.* 48.9] / f. 29r: in beatorum insulas [εἰς μακάρων νήσους; *Protr.* 53.4] / f. 29r: habitandi in beatorum insulas [ἐν μακάρων οἰκῆσαι νήσοις; *Protr.* 53.9–10] / f. 29r: in beatorum insulis [ἐν μακάρων νήσοις; *Protr.* 53.15] / f. 31v: Nunc autem a bonis semoti vivimus agentes necessaria et maxime omnium qui vulgo videntur omnium beatissimi [καὶ μάλιστα πάντων οἱ μάλιστα μακάριοι δοκοῦντες εἶναι τοῖς πολλοῖς; *Protr.* 60.17–18] / f. 35v: maxime beatissimus [μάλιστα μακαριώτατος; *Protr.* 72.6–7] / f. 37v: Si iam haec sic se habent et vita eorum qui in philosophia vivunt: divinior et beatior apparet. [εἰ δὴ ταῦτα οὕτως ἔχει, καὶ ὁ βίος θειότερός τε εἶναι καὶ εὐδαιμονέστερος φαίνεται τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διαγόντων; *Protr.* 77.25–27] / f. 38v: beatum [εὐδαιμονίζειν; *Protr.* 80.22] / Beatos que qui apud ipsos honorantur atque dominantur putare [τοὺς παρ'ἐκείνοις τιμωμένους τε καὶ ἐνδυναστεύοντας; *Protr.* 81.1–2] / beati [εὐδαίμονες; *Protr.* 84.5] / f. 40v: beatiores [εὐδαιμονεστέρους; *Protr.* 85.5–6] / f. 40v: beatiorem [εὐδαιμονέστερος; *Protr.* 85.21] / f. 40v: beatus [εὔδαιμον; *Protr.* 85.23] / f. 42r: Bene autem agentem beatum ac felicem esse [τὸν δὲ εὖ πράττοντα μακάριόν τε καὶ εὐδαίμονα εἶναι; *Protr.* 89.17–18] / f. 42r: beatum [εὐδαίμονα; *Protr.* 89.21] / f. 42r: beatus [εὐδαίμων; *Protr.* 89.26–27] / f. 42r: beatus [τῷ μακαρίῳ; *Protr.* 90.1] / f. 42v: beata vita [τῆς εὐδαίμονος ζωῆς; *Protr.* 90.15] / f. 43r: felix et beatus [εὐδαίμων ἐστὶ καὶ μακάριος; *Protr.* 92.13–14] / f. 43r: et finis beatitudinis [τὸ δὴ τέλος ἁπάσης μακαριότητος; *Protr.* 93.4].

77. For Iamblichus and the Platonic assimilation to God, divinization, or deification, see O'Meara 2007: 31–68; Baltzly 2004; Sedley 1999. Lauster (1998: esp. 47–54, 124–204) has studied the Christian theological dimensions of Ficino's notion of *deificatio*.

78. Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary*, 484–85, trans. Allen 2000; MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163, f. 88r.

79. MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163, f. 113r: Plato, *Euthyd.* 278e–82a (trans. Ficino).

80. MS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5953, f. 18v: Iamblichus, *Protr.* (trans. Ficino); Cf. Iamblichus, *Protr.* 1888: 24.22.

81. MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163, f. 113v.

82. MS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5953, f. 37r: Iambichus, *Protr.* (trans. Ficino); Cf. Iamblichus, *Protr.* 1888: 76.8–11. This is a verbatim quotation from Plato, *Tht.* 176a–b, but Iambichus makes it Pythagorean. Ficino's Latin in the Bodleian manuscript is virtually identical to his letter to Cosimo: MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163, ff. 133v–114r. See n. 42 above for the letter to Cosimo.

83. Without referring to Iamblichus, Toussaint (2013) corroborates the observation that this specific argument might have appealed to Cosimo personally.

84. MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163, f. 2r; Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 105. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaph*. 987a–b.

85. The idea of deification or becoming like God by imitating the Pythagorean persona is certainly present in Iamblichus's *De sect. Pyth*. For other occurences of the goal of assimilating to God by imitating Pythagoras in antiquity see Macris 2006; 2009, who also discusses a number of cases including Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Philostratus's *VA*.

86. Middle Platonism is a very large field. A few useful sources are Merlan 1960; Dillon 1996; Tarrant 2000a; Sharples and Sorabji 2007. On the origins of this periodization see Catana 2013b.

87. Alcinous, *Didaskalikos*, chapter 28; Alcinous, *The Handbook of Platonism* 1993; Alcinoos, *Enseignement des doctrines de Platon* 1990; Baltzly 2004.

88. Ficino 1576: 2: 1128.

89. Ibid.: 2: 1130.

90. Alcinous, *Didaskalikos*, 28.4.

91. Albinus, *Prologos* (= *Der Platoniker Albinos und sein sogenannter Prologos*) 1999: chapter 6: 316.30–318.14.

92. Albinus, *Prologos*, chapter 3: 312.19–36.

93. Diog. Laert. 3.49. Freudenthal 1879; Schissel von Fleschenberg 1928; 1931; Albinus, *Prologos* 1999: 3.

94. Ficino's manuscripts disorganize Albinus's list of dialogues, rearranging the names of *Ti.* and the *Ap.* so that they both seem equally physical and ethical dialogues. They also contain the corrupt τῷ δὲ ἐλεγκτϊκῷ for one of the species of dialogues, meaning elenctic, instead of τῷ δὲ ἐνδεικτικῷ (as corrected by Freudenthal and Reis) or ἐπιδεικτικῷ (as preferred by Schissel), meaning expository or demonstrative. MSS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09 and Plut. 71.33.

95. Ficino 1576: 1: 766.

96. Ibid.: 2: 1132.

97. See the introduction and notes to Alcinoos, *Enseignement des doctrines de Platon* 1990. In Alcinous, *The Handbook of Platonism* 1993: ix–xv, Dillon explains why he changed his mind on the question.

98. See especially *Didaskalikos* 3.1–2; 5–6; Alcinous's and Ficino's terminology do not match exactly, In the *epitome* to the *Meno*, Ficino only speaks of four kinds of argumentation (examples, inductions, syllogisms, and enthymemes) whereas Alcinous explains that dialectical arguments are composed, for example, of division, definition, analysis, induction, and syllogistic—the latter of which is also divided into demonstrative, epicheirematic, and hypothetical, as well as enthymemes. Ficino includes "examples" as a kind of argument in his list probably because it fits more accurately what he thought were the forms of argumentation that the reader encounters in the *Meno*.

99. Alcinous, *The Handbook of Platonism*, 6.4, trans. Dillon 1993.

100. *Didaskalikos* or *Epitome*: Ἀλκϊνόου λόγος δϊδασκαλικοὶ τῶν Πλάτωνος δογμάτων or the Ἐπιτομὴ τῶν Πλάτωνος δογμάτων.

101. Iamblichus 1497 [facsimile 2007].

102. Kristeller, 1937–45: 1: 1–4; Ficino 1576: 1: 619 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 44–45).

103. Kristeller, 1937–45: 2: 105; MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Class. Lat. 163, ff. 1v–2r.

104. Ficino 1576: 2: 1945–46.

105. Kristeller (1986: 159), for instance, mistakenly refers to Albinus's *Prologue* on a few occasions in his catalogues as Alcinous's *Didaskalikos*, probably because he follows Ficino's identification of the authorship of both texts to Alcinous. In his entry to MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816, Kristeller mistakenly lists Alcinous, *De doctrina Platonis*, when the text is in fact by Albinus. In the same entry he also seems to write that MS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Gorg. Gr. 22 includes the *De doctrina Platonis*, probably mistakenly reading *epitomis* instead of Plato's *Epinomis*. Reis (Albinus 1999: 228–32) is the only scholar who has seriously studied Ficino and Albinus.

106. MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816. See Reis's description: Albinos, *Prologos* 1999: 228–32.

107. MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816, f. Ir.

108. MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816, f. Iv, also has the two works listed in the pinax, as: "Alcinoi libellus de opinionibus Platonis" and "Albini prefatio in libro Platonis."

109. "εἰσαγωγὴ εἰς τὸν Πλάτωνος βίβλον, Ἀλβινου Πρόλογος." MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Conv. Soppr. 54. f. 2v; MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09, f. 32v.

110. Ficino's abridgment of Albinus in MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816 might have been in preparation for a translation. Although only Ficino's translation of the *Didaskalikos* survives, testimonies from other authors might offer the possibility that Ficino also translated the *Prologue*. The evidence is very slim, but Giacomo Filippo Foresti da Bergamo (1434–1520) writes that Ficino "Speusippi Alcinoi et Pythagorae etiam opuscula transtulit. Etiam ipsius Alcinoi Platonici de doctrina Platonis vertit" (Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 218). Giacomo Filippo might have understood Ficino's comments in his prefaces to Cosimo and to Cavalcanti to mean that he translated two separate works, a short *opusculum* and another work, *De doctrina Platonis*. Johannes Trithemius also makes a similar claim, writing: "Ad Iohannem Cavalcantem Speusippi, Alcinoi et Pythagorae opuscula traduxit. Ad eundem librum Alcinoi Platonici de doctrina Platonis" (Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 308). If Ficino had translated Albinus along with Alcinous, evidence for it might have been found along with the earliest known fragments of his translation of Alcinous's *Didaskalikos* in MS. Paris, Bibiliothèque nationale de France, Suppl. Gr. 212. This manuscript is largely mutilated, however, containing only a portion of Alcinous's text (ff. 191r–193r or ff. 41r–43r according to the old folio numbers). Aldus Manutius apparently used this manuscript for his 1497 edition of Ficino's works and presumably discarded it thereafter. See Kristeller 1937–45: 1: xxxviii; Sicherl 1962; 1977.

111. Ficino 1576: 2: 1129.

112. Ibid. 2: 1272.

113. Ibid. 2: 1270.

114. Ibid. 2: 1135–36.

115. Ibid. 2: 1300–1303.

116. Ibid. 2: 1297.

117. Ficino, *Commentary on the Sophist*, 218, trans. Allen 1989; Ficino 1576: 2: 1284.

118. Ficino 1576: 2: 1318.

119. Ibid. 2: 1130–31, 1133–34.

120. Hankins (1990a: 1: 332) first began to detect a bipartite order of purification and conversion.

121. Ficino (1576: 1: 724, 766) cites Quintilian on Plato's style.

122. Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.15.26, trans. Butler 1922.

123. Albinus, *Prologos*: 310.18–21.

124. Ibid. 310.33–312.5.

125. Stobaeus, *Ath.* 1884–1912: 2.7.3,49.8. See Mazzarelli 1985. Stobaeus begins speaking of Eudorus's views in *Anth.* 2.7.2,42.7, but some (and most notably Göransson 1995: 188) have doubted that he is still speaking about Eudorus when he begins expounding on the interpretation of Plato at *Anth.* 2.7.3,49.8. See also Dörrie 1944; Tarrant 1993: 56; 2000a: 72–74; Dillon 1996: 114–35; 2000: 3: 290; Kahn 2001: 94–99; Bonazzi 2002; 2005; 2007; 2013a–b; Trapp 2007.

126. Stobaeus, *Ath.* 1884–1912: 2.7.3,49.8.

127. Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 8.

128. Ficino 1576: 2: 1499–1500; see also Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary* 2000: 135, 243, 293, 359.

129. Ficino 1576: 2: 1431.

130. Diog. Laert. 3.51–52.

131. Ibid.

132. Ficino, however, understands the Eleatics as essentially Pythagoreans.

133. Quintilian, *Inst.* 3: 9.2.31–32. For Greek rhetoric and prosopopoeia see (Pseudo-) Demetrius of Phalerum, *On Style* 1902: 188.

134. Ficino 1576: 1: 766. Ficino encountered the division of the Platonic corpus into dialogic characters in Diog. Laert. 3.49; Albinus, *Prologos* 3; Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 6.4; and Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.15.26. On Ficino's *Life of Plato* see Robichaud 2006, and the literature cited therein.

135. Gell. 5.7; Boethius, *De duabus naturis et una persona Jesu Christi* 1847: cols. 1343–44.

136. It should be noted that in other works, e.g., *De civ. D.,* Augustine is more forthcoming in recognizing explicit Platonic doctrines. On the history of the esoteric interpretation of Plato see also Tigerstedt 1974 and 1977.

137. Augustine, *De ord.* 2.20.53–54, *Retract.* 1.3.3, *Contra paganos*, in Augustin d'Hippone 2009: 118; On Augustine and Pythagoreanism see also Marenbon 2015: 28–30; Albertson 2014: 68–79.

138. As a reminder, I refer to MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09.

CHAPTER 3. SOCRATES

Note to epigraph: Ficino 1576: 2: 1356 (*De amore*, 1956: 242–43).

1. Bröcker 1966.

2. O'Meara 2007, esp. 3–12, 31–68. See also Layne and Tarrant 2014, esp. 1–19.

3. Gigon 1947; Magalhães-Vilhena 1952; Vander Waerdt 1994; Judson and Karasmanis 2006; Ahbel-Rappe and Kamtekar 2006; Trapp 2007a.

4. Hankins (2006; 2007a) has done the most thorough exploration of quattrocento Italian humanists' understanding of Socrates. In his words, Bruni's understanding of Socrates and Manetti's important *Life of Socrates* made Socrates "acceptable to Christian readers" (Hankins 2007a: 189) and "a model civic humanist and republican" (ibid.).

5. Hankins (1990a 1: 313) explains that although Ficino does not discard the representation of Socrates as virtous citizen, he modifies the image according to late ancient ideals of philosophical holy men. Moreover, Ficino bravely does not bowdlerize Plato's presentation of Socrates. There is one instance in the *Chrm.* where Ficino allegorizes Socrates' pederasty. See also Robichaud 2017b. Allen rightly focuses his analysis on Ficino's interpretation of Socrates' daemonic conscience: "For him as for us, Socrates is one of the paradigmatic witnesses to the voice of conscience, the model of ethical man who hears and obeys a voice within" (Allen 1998,

128–29, 147). Both Hankins and Allen turn their attention to Ficino's letter from the mid-1480s to the theologian Paolo Ferobanti to explain how Ficino's understanding of the divine Socrates even leads him to claim that the Athenian was, if not an outright prefiguration, at least a foreshadowing of Christ.

6. Augustine, *De civ. D.* 8.3.

7. Ibid.: 8.3–4.

8. Hadot 2002: 101–41.

9. Editions and modern translations of the *De amore* (Ficino 1576: 2: 1320–63): Ficino 1956; 1984; 1985; 1994a; 1996; 2002b. Important studies on the *De amore*: Kristeller 1937–45: 1: cxxiii–cxxv; 1968; Festugière 1941; Allen 1980b; Gentile 1981; 1983; Leinkauf 1989.

10. Kristeller, 1937–45: 1: cxxv–cxxvi; Ficino 1545; 1578; 1987; Matton 2001.

11. See especially Gentile 1981.

12. See Allen's discussion (1980b) on why Ficino increased Cavalcanti's role "and by extension Phaedrus's."

13. On enargeia see Plett 2012; Zanker 1981; Cicero, *De or.* 2.56, 2.59; Quintilian, *Inst.* 6.2.32, 8.3.61, 9.2.40.

14. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Lys.* 7–8.

15. On *ante oculos* among ancients: Zanker 1981: 298–301; e.g., Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.2.40; Cicero, *Part. or.* 6.20; *Rhet. ad Her.* 4.55.68. For a discussion of its place in Renaissance rhetoric see Green 2000.

16. Bembo to Gianfrancesco Pico in DellaNeva and Duvick 2007: 4.4, 4.10; Gianfrancesco Pico to Bembo in ibid.: 5.13, 5.22.

17. Ibid.: 5.22.

18. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Lys.* 7–8.

19. Robichaud 2017a.

20. Plato, *Symp.* 202e–3a; Ficino 1576: 2: 1357–58 (*De amore*, 1956: 246–49). On this topic see Hadot's "L'amour magicien" in Matton 2001: 69–81.

21. Ficino 1576: 2: 1341, 1346–47 (*De amore*, 1956: 199, 212–17).

22. Ficino 1576: 2: 1338 (*De amore*, 1956: 190). On Ficino's argument that spiritus has greater ability to receive influences from the heavens because it is closer in medium to the heavens than matter: see Robichaud 2017a.

23. Ficino 1576: 2: 1355 (*De amore*, 1956: 240). On the importance of Platonic *conversio* for Ficino's thinking see Robichaud 2016a; 2017a; and especially Robichaud and Soranzo 2017.

24. Ficino 1576: 2: 1356 (*De amore*, 1956: 242–43).

25. Ibid.: 2: 1343–52 (*De amore*, 1956: 208–27).

26. Ibid.: 2: 1334 (*De amore*, 1956: 178).

27. Ibid.: 2: 1341–42 (*De amore*, 1956: 200).

28. Ibid.: 2: 1333 (*De amore*, 1956: 176–77).

29. Ibid.: 2: 1323 (*De amore*, 1956: 145).

30. Ibid.: 2: 1326 (*De amore*, 1956: 153). The exposition of Plato's *Second Letter* is at ibid.: 2: 1325 (*De amore*, 1956: 150–51). Ficino also discusses Plato's *Second Letter* in his *Platonic Theology*, 11.4.6–7 and 14.10.4. I examine Ficino's argumentum to the *Second Letter* at length in Chapter 5.

31. Ibid.: 2: 1327–28 (*De amore*, 1956: 155–59).

32. Ibid.: 2: 1328–29 (*De amore*, 1956: 160–61).

33. Ibid.: 2: 1329–30 (*De amore*, 1956: 163–65).

34. Ibid.: 2: 1332 (*De amore*, 1956: 173–74).

35. Ibid.: 2: 1331 (*De amore*, 1956: 169).

36. Ibid.: 2: 1336–37 (*De amore*, 1956: 184–86).

37. Ibid.: 2: 1341 (*De amore*, 1956: 198).

38. Ficino, *Commentarium in Phedrum*, 73, trans. Allen 1981a.

39. Ibid.: 143.

40. Ibid.: 57 (Plato, *Phdr.* 250b–c).

41. Ibid.: 174–75 (Plato, *Phdr.* 249c).

42. Ibid.: 174–75; Allen (1984a: 196–97) also mentions that the Platonic goal of assimilation to God is at work in Ficino's reading of the *Phdr.*

43. Annas 1999.

44. Plato, *Phdr.* 246e–47c. On Zeus's train and Ficino see also Allen 1984a: 113–64.

45. Baltzly 2004: 308.

46. Catana 2014.

47. Kristeller's thinking (1927) on Platonic ethics dates to his earliest work on Plotinus as a graduate student, before Kristeller turned to Ficino and the Renaissance. There are different versions in various languages of Kristeller's large study of Ficino's philosophy; the most recent version is Kristeller 1988. This work studies Ficino's debt to Plotinus but not to later Platonists.

48. Catana 2014: 689.

49. Ibid.: 697–98. The relevant passage is Aquinas, *Sum. Th.* 1a2e q.61–67.

50. Catana 2014: 694–95.

51. See the discussion of this passage from Porphyry's *Plot.* 22–23 in the context of Ficino and Neoplatonic ἐπιστροφή in Robichaud and Soranzo 2017. See also my discussion in Chapter 5. On Plotinus's Oracle see Brisson and Flamand 1982–92; Goulet 1982–92a; 1982–92b; Goulet-Cazé 1982–92.

52. Robichaud 2006. Catana (2014: 689) refers to my argument on this point.

53. Ficino 1576: 763.

54. Robichaud 2006: 29–30. On Kristeller's systematization of Ficino's thinking into a theory of *primum in aliquo genere* see Kristeller 1988: 156. On this notion see also Lloyd (1976), who points to Proclean sources, and Mahoney (1982), who compares it to similar medieval notions.

55. Ficino 1576: 1322 (*De amore*, 1956: 140).

56. On Ficino's use of geometric optics for metaphysics see Robichaud 2017a.

57. On Ficino's discussion of Plotinus and Proclus regarding the Intellect see Robichaud 2016a.

58. Ficino interpreted Plotinus on prayer (*Enn.* 4.4.26–45) with the help of Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus, and Synesius, as well as medieval sources, particularly theories of geometric optics from al-Kindi and Roger Bacon. For the identification of some of his most important sources and for my argument that Ficino's *De vita coelitus comparanda* largely emerges from his interpretation of *Enn.* 4.4.26–45, instead of from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, see Robichaud 2017a, where I also survey the scholarly debate on the question of the *De vita coelitus comparanda*'s origins.

59. Hankins 2006; 2007a; Celenza 2002. Gentile (Gentile et al. 1984: 59) has also proposed that Ficino used MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 92 during the composition of the *De amore*. The manuscript, written by Ficino, contains Plato's *Symp.*, excerpts of the *Phdr.*, epigrams attributed to Plato, along with a variety of late ancient sources on love and beauty: Proclus's *Hymn to Aphrodite*, the *Hymn. Orph. to Aphrod.* and *Eros*, Mosch. *Amor fugitivus*, an excerpt of the *Argon. Orph.*, Musaeus's *Hero and Leander*, followed by Latin summaries of Plotinus's *Enn.* 1.6 (*On Beauty*) and 3.5 (*On Love*).

60. Ficino would have known of this practice from Porphyry's *Plot* 2.37–43.

61. See, for instance, Brisson and Segonds's introduction to Iamblichus, *VP* 2011. Compared to other studies (e.g., Iamblichus, *VP* 1991) they emphasize the question of biographical exemplarity.

62. On the philosophical sage as a living norm, Hadot's work (2002: 101) is still essential.

63. For instance, in his commentary on the *Phdr.* Ficino compares Socrates' inspired speech to the Bible; he similarly discusses the supposed Pythagoreans' story of the fall of the soul in light of biblical prophet's version of the daemon's fall, and Socrates' explanation that love can lead us back to our celestial fatherland while relating Paul's claim that charity is the greatest gift from God. Ficino, *Commentarium in Phedrum*, in Allen 1981a: 75–77, 85.

64. On question of virtuous pagans and/or virtue ethics and paganism see Capéran 1933; Moriarty 2011; Marenbon 2015.

65. Here and elsewhere I quote from Allen's (1998: 211) English translation and Latin edition of the letter (Ficino 1576: 868). See also Robichaud 2006: 31.

66. Allen 1998: 210, 212.

67. On the comparisons between Jesus and Socrates see Smith 1990: 85–115.

68. On Lucian's role in this letter see Allen 1998: 125; Hankins 1990a: 1: 321; on Lucian, Cynicism, and Ficino see Robichaud 2006; and for Lucian in the Renaissance see Robinson 1979 and Marsh 1998.

69. Allen 1998: 125; Hankins 2006; 2007a; and Conti 2014. Allen makes a case that one should read the letter in light of Ficino's *epitome* to Plato's *Ap*. Reading both documents together certainly helps us understand Ficino's Socrates—as would also Ficino's commentary on Plotinus, *Enn.* 3.4, and, as Ficino himself recommends (1576: 2: 1390), also would the reading of the *Phd.*, *Gr.*, and *Cri*. I think, however, that the explicit references to the *De amore* in the letter to Ferobanti should not be overlooked.

70. Allen 1998: 209–12.

71. Allen (1998: 125) thinks that Ficino is worried that Ferobanti might misinterpret his present letter, but I think that Ficino is speaking about how others have already misinterpreted his previous writings on Socrates. The letter's specific references to the *De amore*'s categories of *ingenitus* and *infusus* to explain Ficino's Socrates and virtue ethics further underscore that Ficino is discussing the misinterpretation of a previous text, i.e., the *De amore*, which makes his letter an apology.

72. Allen 1998: 209, 211.

73. Ibid.: 210, 212. On Ficino and the transfiguration see Allen's prefatory remarks and Ficino's comments in Ficino 2015: 1: xxiv, 136–40, as well as Allen 2006: 239–40 and 2014c: 61–62.

74. See also Ficino 1576: 1: 632; Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 96.

75. Robichaud 2017a.

76. Ficino 1576: 1: 572–75. These letters are now in Ficino 2002a: 396–405. On Ficino's use of canine rhetoric see Robichaud 2006.

77. Ficino 1576: 1: 912.

78. Many of the dedicatory letters are in Ficino 1576: 1: 904–5; see della Torre 1902: 624.

79. Ficino 1576: 1: 904.

80. Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, 160–61 (*De vita* 1.26), ed. and trans. Kaske and Clark 2002a.

81. On Antonio Ivani da Sarzana, see Landucci Ruffo 1966; Fubini 1994: 136–82; and Ivani 2006. della Torre (1902: 603) and Marcel (Ficino 1956: 13–14, 22, 43) refer to his letters sporadically only to date Ficino's work on the *De amore*.

82. The two exchanged a few letters, Ivani knew a number of Ficino's works, and Ivani also sent his *De fortuna* in return. Ficino also recommended the painter Piero Pollaiuolo (c. 1443–96) to Ivani. Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 243–50.

83. Landucci Ruffo 1966: 153–54.

84. Ivani might specifically have been thinking of the big fish from John 21:11, and might also have been addressing this particular story to Ficino with a playful allusion to Augustine's story (*De civ. D.* 22.8) of a certain Florentius of Hippo, a poor and pious tailor who lost his cloak but found a big fish on the shore.

85. Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 248–49.

86. Ficino 1576: 1: 806.

87. On the salvation of the pagans see Capéran 1933; Moriarty 2011; Marenbon 2015. Marenbon (2015: 285) devotes a paragraph to Ficino's reply but not to Ivani's original letter.

88. See Aquinas, *Sum. Th.* 1a2e, q. 99.

89. Cf., Justin Martyr, *First Apol.* 59–60; *Second Apol.* 13.

90. See Aquinas, *Sum. Th.* 1a2e, q. 65; and Marenbon's (2015: 160–64) discussion.

91. See Aquinas, *Sum. Th.* 2a2e, q. 2, where Aquinas argues in article 7 that those held in limbo do not have explicit faith until Christ is made manifest to them, fulfilling his prophecy.

92. Ficino 1576: 1: 806.

93. Landucci Ruffo 1966: 154.

94. Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 249–50; Landucci Ruffo 1966: 193.

95. Ruffo (1966: 202–3) quotes the full letter.

96. See the first book of Augustine, *De doctr. Christ.* See also *De civ. D.* 2.7; and book 4.

97. Augustine, *De civ. D.* 2.7.

98. Augustine, *Ep.* 102.8–15.

99. Ibid.: 102.12. See also *De civ. D.* 10.32.

100. Augustine, *Ep.* 102.14.

101. See my Chapter 2, n. 137.

102. Ficino 1576: 1: 77.

103. Ibid.: 2: 1390. This later edition entitles this work as "In Phaedonem Epitome" whereas the 1484 Plato prints "Argumentum Marsilii in Phaedonem." See also Conti: 2014. For Ficino's understanding of Moses see also Ficino 2015: 1: xxiii–iv, and xxviii–ix.

104. Ibid.: 1: 782.

105. See also Allen's (1998: 37–49) discussion. Hankins (1990a: 464) presents the hypothesis for the three Continental sources.

106. Ficino 1576: 1: 25.

107. See again Ficino 1576: 1: 25. I am developing an interpretation that I began to put forward in Robichaud 2006: 31–33.

108. Ficino 1576: 1: 648–49 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010:1: 153–54). I quote this letter in my discussion of philosophical exemplarity in Robichaud 2006: 33. Ficino employs the same argument elsewhere, for instance, Ficino 1576: 1: 609, 618 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 11, 41).

109. Ibid.: 1: 619, 631–32 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 43, 90–91).

110. Ibid.: 1: 658–59 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 190–92).

111. Ficino introduces the idea that Plato is equally human and divine according to the triad of philosophical exemplars, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato: ibid.: 2: 1488.

112. On Ficino and Lucretius see chapter 2 of Brown 2010; Snyder 2011; and Ada Palmer's comments (2014: 27, 31–32, 37–38, 234–35). On Ficino's early work on Proclus see Robichaud 2016a.

113. Corsi, *Vita Marsilii Ficini*, in Marcel 1958: 683.

114. Della Torre (1902: 566–68, 587–694) argued that Ficino fell into heresy and even paganism during a moment of spiritual crisis and moral depression sparked by his philosophical studies before converting to Christianity and eventually taking orders in 1473. He accordingly also thought that Ficino wrote two versions of *De amore*. Kristeller (1938) put these speculations to rest, arguing that this thesis lacked documented evidence. A few years thereafter (Ficino 1956; Marcel 1958), Marcel argued against the two versions of *De amore* and once more for a certain spiritual crisis, but he greatly tempered della Torre's narrative by claiming that the conversion of Ficino from paganism to Christianity signifies nothing more than his decision to take vows and become a priest. Allen (Ficino 2000: 10–11) suggested that there is no reason to deny the possibility that Ficino became "dispirited" at this time because of the difficulties of writing a commentary on the *Phlb*. Hankins (1990a: 1: 278–83 and 2: 454–59) has argued that "the most plausible interpretation of the episode is that Ficino, like Pletho before him, was more of a heretic than a pagan," and Celenza (2002: 73) has commented on the possibility that "one could be a sincere Christian, as I believe Ficino was, and still be a legitimate advocate of practices which in hindsight seem heterodox."

115. Corsi, *Vita Marsilii Ficini*, in Marcel 1958: 681.

116. On Ficino's notion of melancholic genius and how it operates in his preface to Plotinus (1576: 2: 1537–38) see Robichaud 2017b. For Ficino, melancholy, and Saturnian influences see Robichaud 2017a; Klibansky et al. 1964; Kaske and Clark's introduction to Ficino 2002a: 19–24; and Chastel 1996: 177–81.

117. Corsi, *Vita Marsilii Ficini*, in Marcel 1958: 683.

118. Kristeller 1987b; Allen 2014b; Robichaud 2016a.

119. Corsi, *Vita Marsilii Ficini*, in Marcel 1958: 683; Ficino 1956: 23–24.

120. See Ficino 1495: f. 145v; 1576: 1: 871; Gentile's comments in Ficino, Lettere 1990–2010: 1: xxxv–xxxvi; Hankins 1990a: 286, 302–3; Conti 2014: 61; Robichaud 2017b: 143. Lomeier (1680: 238–39) and Creuzer (1854: 18), for example, spread the story found in a life of Savonarola that Ficino kept a candle burning in front of a bust of Plato. On Ficino's image of Plato see also Marel 1958: 293.

121. Marenbon 2015: 51.

122. Ficino 1576: 1: 639 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 121–22). See also the adjacent letters to Lorenzo de' Medici and Niccolò Michelozzi, 1576: 1: 639–40 (*Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 120–23).

123. For these figures of Renaissance art see especially Dempsey 2001.

CHAPTER 4. PYTHAGORAS AND PYTHAGOREANS

Note to epigraph: The text of the lecture is available in MS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5953, ff. 321r–26r; Ficino 1576: 1: 761–63; and Podolak 2011: 103–09.

1. The passages from Eudorus that are of interest are in Stobaeus, beginning at *Anth*. 2.7.3,49.8. The relevant material from Numenius is preserved in Eusebius's *Praep. evang.* See Numénius, *Fragments* 1973: fr. 24.

2. Stobaeus records fragments of Eudorus, and another fragment by a certain Didymus purported by many to be Arius Didymus, Augustus's court philosopher, who in turn quotes, it is normally thought but sometimes doubted, Eudorus. The passages are Stobaeus, *Anth*. 1884–1912: 2.7.2,42.7; 2.7.3,49.8; 2.7.3,51.15; 2.7.3,52.7; 2.7.3,52.13; 2.7.4,54.10; 2.7.4,55.5; 2.7.4,55.2; 2.7.4,56.24. These passages have been assembled in Mazzarelli 1985. On Eudorus see the works cited in my Chapter 2, n. 125.

3. Stobaeus, *Anth*. 2.7.3,49.12.

4. Simplicius, *In Arist. Phys.* 181.10–30 (Mazzarelli 1985: 201); on this passage see Bonazzi 2002; Rist 1965a.

5. Zeller (1868: 65–207) proposed that the material came from Alexandria in the first century BCE. See also Baltes 1972: 23, 79–82; Dillon 1996: 117–21; Bonazzi 2005; 2007; 2013a: 164–71; 2013b; Centrone 2014: esp. 323, 338; Ulacco 2016.

6. See Burkert 1961; 1972b; Thesleff 1961; 1965; 1972; Centrone 2000; 2014.

7. Thesleff 1961: 27–29, 71–77, 99–100.

8. Burkert 1972a: 166–92, 219; Thesleff 1965: 155–63.

9. Centrone (2014) offers a recent review, but see also nn. 5 and 6 above.

10. Frede 1987; Kahn 2001: 94–138; Ulacco 2016.

11. Brotinus is an exception in Thesleff's second class, since he is thought to have been one of Pythagoras's first disciples.

12. Allen (1984a: 204–58) demonstrates that Ficino's Pythagoreanism is also especially at play in his *Phdr.* commentary.

13. Iamblichus, *Myst.* 1497 includes the following translations: Iamblichus, *Myst.*; Porphyry, *Abst.* and *Sent.*; Proclus, *De Sacr. et mag.*, *In Alc.*, and portions of *In R.*; Synesius, *De insomn.*; Psellus, *De Daem.*; Priscian of Lydia, commentary on Theophrastus's *De sens.*; Alcinous, *Didascal.*; Xenocrates, *De morte*; Speusippus, *Liber de platonis def.*, as well as the Pythagorean *Aurea verba* and *Symbola*. Some of these translations are paraphrastic exegeses or partial translations.

14. See my Chapter 2, n. 17. Ficino would also have known from Diogenes Laertius of Pythagoras's supposed writings, for example, the *Tripartitum* and the *Sacred Discourses*, as well as some of the debates surrounding them in antiquity.

15. Ficino 1576: 2: 1531.

16. Allen and Celenza's readings begin to correct the previous neglect by modern scholars of the Pythagorean dimension of Ficino's work. Celenza (1999; 2001a: 15-,52) has demonstrated that the publication by Ficino of the *Symbola* and the *Aurea verba* enhanced both his and Pythagoras's influence, and spawned a series of imitative approaches toward Pythagorean thaumaturgy and soteriology in the Renaissance. The enigmatic, symbolic, and religious nature of these two sets of texts required a vatic interpreter, like Ficino, to rescue their meaning from nonsense. Allen (1982b; 1994; 2014a) has also shed light on Ficino's Pythagoreanizing by studying his employment of Pythagorean mathematics and harmonic theories, most notably to decipher the arithmetical arrangement of marriages in *Resp.* On the Iamblichean dimensions in the Renaissance now see also Toussaint 2014a and 2014b. More generally on Pythagoras in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance see Joost-Gaugier 2006; 2014; and Palmer 2016.

17. Kristeller (1937–45: 1: cxlv–cxlvii) also identified Ficino's translation of Hermias. I have documented (2016a) the fragmentary evidence for Ficino's lost translations of Proclus's *El. Th.* and *El. Ph.* I am adopting Ficino's title for Iamblichus's work, which is the translation of the Greek title that he found in the pinax to MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 86.03. Three Greek titles are given by the manuscript tradition: Περὶ τῆς πυθαγορικῆς αἱρέσεως, ἡ τῶν πυθαγορείων δογμάτων συναγωγή, Πυθαγόρεια ὑπομνήματα. On Ficino and the *De sect. Pyth.* see Gentile 1990; Allen 1994: 32–34; Celenza 2001a: 15–34; Robichaud 2016b.

18. Renger and Stavru 2016.

19. Taylor 1928: 11; See Huffman's (2013: 264) discussion.

20. Some, like Huffman (2013), restrict Plato's direct engagement with Pythagorean thinking to a small and specific set of locations in the dialogues (e.g., Philolaus's principles in *Phlb.* and Archytas's kindred sciences of astronomy and harmonic theory in *Resp.*); others, like Kahn (2001), find much Pythagorean influence in Plato's accounts of metempsychosis and eschatology; others, like Zhmud (2012), revise some of Burkert's positions, doubting that the Academy in fact

attributed Platonic doctrines to Pythagoreans; others still, like Brisson (2002; 2007; 2008; 2013), develop an even more critical approach, questioning whether any of Philolaus's and Archytas's fragments can be considered legitimate without recourse to further testimonies, and whether it even makes sense to call Archytas a Pythagorean at all. See also John Palmer 2014.

21. Along with Celenza's explanation (2001a: 21–22) that Ficino crafted his own image on the model of a "Iamblichean/Pythagorean holy man," Allen (2014a: 436–40) has argued that Ficino's own Orphic compositions (which he sang with a lyre) were modeled on Pythagorean musical and therapeutic exercises. On Ficino and Pythagorean singing see also Robichaud 2017a. Ficino uses the specific term *exercitatio*, as well as the more general *verbum* and *cantus* for the precise Pythagorean terms denoting specific musical arrangements (ἐξάρτυσις), and its related exercises (ἄσκησις) and devout practices (ἐπιτήδευσις), as described in Iamblichus's *VP*. On these practices see the discussion in Delatte 1999b: 136–38. On Ficino and Orphic myths in the quattrocento see Walker 1958; 1972; Klutstein 1987; and Toussaint 2000.

22. The hypothesis has been advanced that Iamblichus's list is based on a work by Aristoxenus: Burkert 1972a: 105, n. 40; Brisson 2002: 27–28; 2008: 44–46, 53–54; 2007.

23. Walker 1972; Hankins 1990a: 2: 460–64; Gentile 1990; Allen 1998: 1–49, and Campanelli's introduction to Hermes Trismegistus 2011. Also Robichaud 2017a.

24. Lobeck 1829: 723; Detienne 1963; 1973; Vernant 1973; Brisson 2000b; Huffman 2009; Bernabé 2013; Bordoy 2013; Betegh 2014.

25. Plato, *Resp*. 530c–31a, 600a–b.

26. Plato refers to Philolaus in *Phd*. 61d–e and Archytas in his letters (if they are taken as authentic): *Epist*. 7.338c–39d, 7.350a, 9.357e, 12.359c–d, 13.360b. *Epist*. 7 is perhaps the most important here, but *Epist*. 9 and 12 (which are typically considered apocryphal) are addressed to Archytas.

27. Ficino 1576: 2: 1438. For Ficino and the *Timaeus* in general see Allen 1987 and Hankins 1999.

28. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 24, f. 1r.

29. Ibid., f. 3v.

30. See recently Brisson 2000a: 25–41.

31. Iamblichus, *In Nic. arith*. 1894: 105.10–17.

32. Ficino 1576: 2: 1445–47. Ficino studied Proclus's *In Ti*. in MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 24, but also, as Megna (2003) has argued, in MS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chigi R. VIII 58. The personal copy Ficino owned of Calcidius's *In Ti*. includes a note by Ficino indicating that he copied it between February and March 1954: MS. Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, cod. S. 14 sup. The manuscript also contains Bruni's translation of *Grg*., excerpts from Augustine's *De civ. D*., Apuleius's *De deo Soc*., and Cicero's *Top*.

33. Ficino 1576: 2: 1442.

34. Ibid.

35. Stobaeus, *Anth*. 2.7.3,49.8.

36. On *Ti*. 90a–d, see Sedley 1999.

37. Ficino 1576: 2: 1484.

38. On Ficino and the vehicle of the soul see Celenza 2002 and Corrias 2012. For a study of the topic in Iamblichus see Finamore 1985.

39. Ficino 1576: 2: 1466.

40. Timaeus Locrus, *De natura mundi et animae* 1972: 83–88. One should not confuse Ficino's reference here with the Pseudo-Aristotelian *De mundo*.

41. The work of Burkert (1972a: esp. 218–98) and Huffman (1993) has clarified much of the previous scholarly work on Philolaus. Philolaus's value for understanding Pythagoreanism resides

in the fact that he is supposedly the first philosopher from the group actually to circulate his writings. See also McKirahan 2013; Graham 2014. For a critique of Huffman's work on Philolaus see Brisson 2002; 2007.

42. Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 142, 147.

43. Ibid.: 2: 86. See Iamblichus, *VP* 1937: 33 (229–40).

44. Pico 1942 : 118.

45. Ficino 1576: 2: 1786, which is a commentary on Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.6.12. Ficino takes this information from Iamblichus, *In Nic. arith.* 10.22.

46. See Robichaud 2017a: 57. For Philolaus, Hestia, and the theory of a central fire see also Huffman 1993: 231–88; Graham 2014: 55–60.

47. Riginos 1976: 165–74; Burkert 1972a: 218–98; Brisson 2002a: 33–34.

48. Iamblichus, *VP*: 31 (199). See also Iamblichus, *Theol. Arith.* 1922: 25–26.

49. Graham 2014: 48; Huffman 1993: xiii–xiv.

50. Ficino 1576: 1: 764.

51. See n. 23 above for Ficino's ancient theology. For his *Argumentum* to the *Corpus Hermeticum* (*Pimander*) see Ficino 1576: 2: 1836 (*Hermes Trismegistus* 2011: 306). On Pletho's identification of Zoroaster as the author of the *Oracula Chaldaica* see Bidez and Cumont 1938: 2: 251. On the *Oracula Chaldaica* see Lewy 2011. Hankins (1990a: 2: 463, n. 12, 464) presents the hypothesis that the three sources of the ancient theology correspond to the three known continents. Allen (1998: 31–41) argues that Ficino understands the Epiphany and the arrival of the three Magi as a Zoroastrian event.

52. Ficino, *Platonic Theology* 17.4.4, trans. Allen 2001–6, see also ibid. 13.4, and esp. 17.2, which speaks of God as unity, the Dyad, and number.

53. Aristotle, *Metaph.* 985b22–88a16, esp. 987a29–b14.

54. See, for instance, Huffman 2013; Kahn 2001: 39–62; Brisson 2002; John Palmer 2014.

55. Ficino 1576: 2: 1395.

56. Ibid.: 2: 1396.

57. Plato, *Phd.* 84e–85c.

58. Ficino would have known from Aristotle and Iamblichus, for example, that Pythagoras was called the Hyperborean Apollo.

59. Ficino 1576: 2: 1396.

60. Ibid.: 1: 651 (Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 161–63).

61. See n. 21 above.

62. On Pythagoreanism and the *Phd.* see Ebert 1994; Frede 1999: 25; Plato, *Phd.* 2004: 126–28; Huffman 1993: 323–32; 2013: 248–50; Sedley 1995; Kahn 2001: 4, 39–62; Brisson 2002: 29–31; Figari 2008; John Palmer 2014: 210–14. Porphyry recounts (*Plot.* 11) that Plotinus dissuaded him from committing suicide.

63. Ficino 1576: 2: 1591. Interestingly, Ficino, probably on the authority of Psellus, attributes Plotinus's own opening saying in *Enn.* 1.9 to the *Oracula Chaldaica*. See Psellus, *Expositio* on the *Oracula Chaldaica* 1889: 1125c–d.

64. Olympiodorus, *In Plat. Phaed.* 1913: A.1.13.

65. Ficino 1576: 2: 1318. In an earlier interpretation of the *Grg.* passage in his *De voluptate*, Ficino attributes this myth to Archytas. In *Med.* 1224 Euripides writes that our mortal life is a shadow. Allen kindly reminds me of another passage where Ficino writes "Euripides hanc vitam umbrae somnium appellaverit" (Ficino, *Platonic Theology*. 14.7.7, trans. Allen 2001–6) in the context of discussing the Platonists and Pythagoreans' opinon regarding the *corporis carcere*. It seems to me that Ficino probably attributed a line from Pindar's *Pyth*. 8.95–96 (σκιᾶς ὄναρ

ἄνθρωπος) to Euripides (see n. 43 in Ficino, *Platonic Theology*. 14.7.7., trans. Allen 2001–6) because of his reading of this myth from the *Grg.*

66. Clement, *Str.* 3.17.

67. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09, f. 180r. See Greene 1938: 155. Ficino might have known of Olympiodorus's commentary on the *Grg.*, but his manuscript of Olympiodorus's commentary on the *Phd.* (MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 37) does not include it. Ficino's notes on this manuscript are published in Westerink 1968.

68. Iamblichus, *Protr.* 1989: 17 (84).

69. MSS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 86.03, f. 70r, and Plut. 86.29, f. 131r.

70. In one of the first important commentaries on the *Grg.* myth Boeckh (1819: 181–89) discounted the scholiast's identification of the ingenious man from Italy or Sicily as Empedocles, instead favoring Philolaus, whom he also thought was meant by the sage. Yet as Burkert (1972a: 248–49, n. 48) has shown, almost every modern interpreter of this passage since Boeckh has made the same mistake of conflating the sage and the mythographer into a single person. Ficino did not make this mistake, identifying Philolaus and Empedocles separately. Huffman (1993: 402–6; 2013: 252–54) thinks that it "does not seem likely" that Plato is referring to Pythagoreans like Philolaus or Archytas. Although Burkert (1972a: 248–49, n. 48) claims that it is not a "sure indication" that Plato refers to Pythagoreans when he employs σοφός, and even though he has critiqued the previous identification of Philolaus, he returns to the suggestion of Empedocles as a possible "Pythagorean influence" in this passage. See also Dodds's comments on the passage in Plato, *Grg.* 1990; and John Palmer 2014: 204–10.

71. Plato, *Phlb.* 11d.

72. Ibid. 13e–14a.

73. Ibid. 15b.

74. Plato, *Phlb.* 16c–d, trans. Hackforth 1996.

75. This interpretation has been put forward by Hackforth (1954: 21). See also Plato, *Phlb.* 1975: 83; 165, and Huffman's discussion (2001: 69–70) of the identification of Prometheus with Pythagoras.

76. Huffman 2001: 71–72.

77. Idem 1993: 93 (fr. 1). Huffman argues that Plato is not so much repeating Philolaus as translating his metaphysical principles and philosophical methods for his own purposes. Specifically, he adapts Philolaus's principles of limit and unlimited so that they apply to his own particular problem of the One and the Many. As evidence, Huffman proposes Aristotle's testimony in *Metaph.* 987b26, where Aristotle claims that it is precisely concerning the nature of the unlimited that Plato differs from the Pythagoreans.

78. Allen is the only scholar so far to have studied Ficino's interpretation of the *Phlb.* in depth, and he explains that Ficino follows the lecture notes of Damascius (or of Olympiodorus, as Ficino thought) on the *Phlb.* in explaining Prometheus as the personification of divine providence extending its power to the human mind. In Allen's reading (1998: 157–59; 2011) of Ficino's interpretation, the Promethean fire was the blaze of intelligence radiating a light connecting Ficino's six ancient theologians to each other. On this work see Damascius 1982; on Ficino and this work see Westerink 1968. Ficino attributes the lecture notes to Olympiodorus in *The Philebus Commentary* 2000: 325, 443.

79. Allen's comments are based on book 1, chapter 26 of Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary* 2000. This passage is from book 2, chapters 1–2, ibid.: 402–7.

80. Ficino might have been inspired to do so from Proclus's *In Ti.* 1.176.8–35, 2.384.6–386.13.

81. Dillon 1996: 126–29.

82. Plato, *Soph.* 251d–54c. For Ficino on the five kinds see also Allen 1989: 79–81.

83. Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary*, 403–7, trans. Allen 2000.

84. Ibid. On Ficino and these two triads see Robichaud 2016a.

85. Plato, *Soph.* 248e. For the triad see my Chapter 2, n. 62.

86. Cornford 1935: 244–46. Gersh (1973) explains how the intellectual dynamism came to be central to Proclus's own metaphysics. See also Robichaud 2016a; Robichaud and Soranzo 2017.

87. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 37. On this manuscript see Westerink 1968.

88. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 70.

89. Ibid., f. 4v. Saffrey 1959.

90. Ibid., f. 2r. Saffrey 1959: 171.

91. Ibid.

92. Ficino would also have been familiar with Proclus's discussion of Philolaus's principles where Philolaus posits a unified triad after the monad and the indefinite dyad. See Proclus, *In Ti.* 1.176.28, also Huffman 1993: 165–67 (Testimonium A9). Proclus's own adoption of the triad remaining-procession-return to explain the derivation of principles might have had its source of inspiration in turn from Iamblichus. See Proclus, *In Ti.* 2.215.5–29. On Proclus and the limit and unlimited see also Van Riel 2000; 2001.

93. Proclus, *Th. Pl.* 2003: 1.5 (25.24–26.9).

94. See Allen 1989: 12, n. 3.

95. Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato's Parmenides* 2012a: 1: 165–67. Aristotle (*Metaph.* 986b8) too speaks of Melissus and Parmenides in light of the principles of limit and unlimited.

96. On Ficino's critique of Proclus's interpretation of the *Prm.* see Vanhaelen in Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato's Parmenides* 2012a: 1: xxvii–xxviii. On Ficino, dialectic, and Proclus see Allen 1998: 149–93. More generally on Ficino and Proclus see Robichaud 2016a and Chapter 2, n. 32 above.

97. Damascius, *Lectures on the Philebus*, §57. Allen correctly noted (1998: 157–59, n. 84) that Ficino followed Damascius (or in his mind Olympiodorus) in interpreting the myth of Prometheus. My present argument stresses that Ficino would have considered this as Iamblichus's Pythagorean interpretation of the *Phlb.* On Ficino and Prometheus see Allen 1998: 149–93; and 2011, where Allen explains how Ficino reinterpreted the myth of Prometheus.

98. O'Meara 1999a: 194–95; 2006: 148–49; Van Riel 1999: 169–90; Damascius, *Lectures on the Philebus*, §5.

99. Damascius, *Lectures on the Philebus*, §§3–5.

100. Proclus and Iamblichus differ specifically regarding Iamblichus's claim that mathematicals are real intermediary entities between the soul and higher regions of the divine, and Proclus's arguments that mathematicals are the soul's projection of its cognizant capacities, structured and derived it seems from Philolaus's dyad of limited and unlimited. See Merlan 1960: 11–33; O'Meara 2006: 156–76; Cleary 2000: 85–101.

101. On Proclus's debt to Iamblichus on this point see O'Meara 2006: 148–49; for Proclus's debt to Iamblichus's interpretation of the divided line see nn. 127–28 below, and for the *Epin.* see Chapter 5.

102. Westerink 1968: 367.

103. See Dillon's remarks in Iamblichus 2009: 29–33.

104. O'Meara (1999a: 199–201) has made a similar argument for Iamblichus's interpretation of the dialogue.

105. MS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5953. There is another preserved in MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 21.8. Fragments of this version are also in

MS. Pesaro, Biblioteca Oliveriana, 620. The final version of the text is in the 1496 edition of Ficino, *Commentaria in Platonem*. See Allen's study in Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary* 2000: 8–15; and Robichaud 2006. On MS. Vat. Lat. 5953 see also Kristeller 1937–45: 1: xli-xlii; Gentile et al. 1984: 33–34; Gentile 1990; Podolak 2011. Allen (Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary* 2000: 48–56) has argued persuasively that Ficino's commentary on the *Phlb.* originated around 1469. See also ibid. 546, n. 189. Ficino had access to Iamblichus's *De sect. Pyth.* (see my Chapter 2 and later in this chapter) and Proclus's *Pl. Th.* by 1469 (see later in this chapter) to help him arrive at a dialectical understanding of limit and unlimited. Despite referring to Pythagoras and Pythagoreans a number of times in his commentary to the *Phlb*. Ficino only makes two explicit mentions of Iamblichus, as a subscript in MS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5953 (see n. 106 below) and in an addition to MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 21.08, along with Proclus and Syrianus (see Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary* 2000: 425, n. 4, and 443). Proclus too only gets two explicit mentions in the commentary (ibid.: 141 and 443).

106. As for the dates of MS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5953, it must have been produced at a later date, perhaps between 1483/6 and 1491/2. Yet the manuscript contains many of Ficino's youthful works. There is also a suggestive note in this manuscript at the end of the incomplete section on the limit and unlimited of the *Phlb.* commentary indicating that the work should be considered in the same category as his earlier translations: "I Marsilio Ficino have not yet completed, nor emended, these commentaries. The same goes for my translations of Iamblichus and Hermias. *Finis*" (MS. Vat. Lat. 5953, f. 413v). See also Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary* 2000: 425, n. 4; and Gentile 1990. In fact, the manuscript must have been copied from a previous version of the text, which might have been Ficino's own working manuscript (likely containing at least Iamblichus, Hermias, and the *Phlb.* material), since the manuscript includes many of Ficino's "aliter" variants in the body of the text of Iamblichus. This is unusual, since Ficino often writes his "aliter" variants in the margins or interlinearly, both when correcting the Greek text of a manuscript (as in MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816) and when he revises his Latin translations (as in MSS. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Conv. Soppr. E. 1. 2562, and Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 82.10–11). This means that the copyist of Vat. Lat. 5953, Luca Fabiani, would have either inserted the marginal variants into the body of the text or copied from another manuscript that had already done so. The following evidence needs to be taken into consideration for dating: MS. Vat. Lat. 5953 contains Ficino's letter to Braccio Martelli (which I discuss at length in Chapter 5), entitled *Concordia Mosis et Platonis*, which begins with the Pythagorean-Platonist Numenius's comparison of Moses and Plato, and which Ficino included in the eighth book of his epistles. Kristeller (1937–45, 1: cii–ciii) dates the eighth book from the summer of 1484 to October 1488, and this specific letter by 1487. The letter is undated and could have been written earlier, but it might be a relatively late work, since it demonstrates Ficino's knowledge of Plotinus, and Iamblichus's *Myst.*, a great number of other Platonists, such as Pseudo-Dionysius, Hermias, Augustine, and the Platonic corpus as a whole. In fact, the letter functions like an introduction to the Platonic corpus. At the very least it can be established that it was already written by 29 May 1484 since Ficino already mentions the existence of this letter as being a part of his eighth book of epistles in his argumentum to the *Phd*. in the earliest printing of his 1484 Plato (Plato 1484: f. 269v; Kristeller 1978: 140–43). Conti (2014: 59–61) has hypothesized that Ficino wrote this letter in the end of 1483 and the beginning of 1484. Assuming that Ficino did not finish the letter before 1483/84 it would mean that MS. Vat. Lat. 5953 would have been copied between that time and before 1492 when its former owner Pierleone da Spoleto died—a more accurate dating of this letter might change this hypothetical dating. MS. Vat. Lat. 5953, f. 2v, also contains a miniature of an unidentified heraldic coat of arms.

Some have speculated that there must have been another owner of the manuscript before Pierleone (see Podolak 2011: 92). Bacchelli (2001: 3n.10), however, has hypothesized that Pierleone had MS. Vat. Lat. 5953 copied for himself between the summer of 1485 and September 1486, after he began to read Iamblichus's *De sect. Pyth*. in Pico's own manuscript (MS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 4530), and before 1491 since the manuscript contains an earlier version of the *Phlb*. commentary than the 1491 edition, which assumes that Pierleoni would not have copied the earlier version of the commentary after the 1491 printing. Further study is required to determine when the miniature was added and to whom it belongs but it is important to note that another manuscript owned by Pierleone also contained the same coat of arms (MS. Chicago, Art Institute, 20–97; see Ruysschaert 1960: 49–50). MS. Vat. Lat. 5953 was inherited by Pierleone's heirs, and found its way to Lelio Ruini, the bishop of Bagnoregio, before it ended up in the Vatican Library in 1623. We know from Ficino's first preface to Iamblichus's *Myst*. that Pierleone encouraged Ficino to rush its publication, was an enthusiast of Iamblichus and Proclus, and also worked on mathematics and philosophy: Ficino 1576: 1: 895, 898, 900, 903 (see also Gentile 1990: 73). If there was another owner before Pierleone, he would not have had it for very long.

107. For the analytical description of this manuscript see Podolak 2011: 89–90.

108. Corsi, *Vita Marsilii Ficini*, in Marcel 1958: 683; MS Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 21.08 and the *Commentaria in Platonem* (1496) preserve the following title: "Collecta cursim ex lectionibus Marsilii Ficini in *Philebum*." The *Commentaria in Platonem* also includes the postscripts: "Sequuntur divulsae quaedam annotationum reliquiae ex eisdem Marsilii lectionibus collectae. Commentaria vero Marsilii ordine disposita breviter sunt in ipso Philebi textu" and "Hactenus collecta cursim ex Marsilianis lectionibus in priores Philebi partes. Expositiones autem reliquas in commentariis eiusdem in totum Philebum legito. Sequuntur ergo deinceps distinctiones capitum in Philebo capitumque summae pro commentariis." (Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary* 2000: 71, 425, 439.)

109. For a more detailed analysis of these lectures see Allen 1977; Robichaud 2006 and Podolak 2011: 102–9. The material from this first lecture became the letter *De Platonica philosophia natura, institutione, actione* (Ficino 1576: 1: 761–63).

110. Ficino 1576: 1: 763.

111. Westerink et al. 1990: lviii–lxvii.

112. O'Meara 1999b: 197; 2007.

113. Allen 1982b: 174–75; Celenza 1999: 687–89.

114. Plato, *Resp*. 530d–31d.

115. On Iamblichus's *De com. math. sc.*, see Merlan 1960; Romano 1995; 2000; Bechtle 2000; Napolitano Valditara 2000; O'Meara 2006: 44–51, 157–66; and Brisson 2012.

116. Iamblichus, *De com. math. sc.* 1891: 12.18–13.9, 29.20–22.

117. Ibid.: 27.24–28.1.

118. Ibid.: 31.4–7. Huffman 2007: 110.

119. Plato, *Epin*. 991e3–92b3.

120. Iamblichus, *De com. math. sc.* 1891: 32.8–12.

121. Ibid.: 34.20–35.6. Thesleff 1965: 55.

122. Iamblichus, *De com. math. sc.* 1891: 35.27–37.2. Thesleff 1965: 36–39.

123. Proclus, *In Eucl*. 5, trans. Morrow 1992.

124. Ibid., 10.15–27. For the Greek text: Proclus, *In Eucl*. 1873: 10.15–27.

125. Proclus, *In R*. 1899: 1.288.6–20.

126. Plato, *Ti*. 31c; *Leg*. 757b.

127. See Mueller 1987; O'Meara 1988; 2006: 164–66. Festa (Iamblichus 1891) and van der Waerden (1980) speculated on a possible common source for Iamblichus and Proclus, but despite

his different approach Proclus would have studied Iamblichus's work, perhaps under the influence of his teacher Syrianus, who (as indicated later in this chapter) was well versed in Pythagorean material. This point further corrects the previous tendencies to overexaggerate Proclus's distancing from Iamblichus and Pythagorean philosophy.

128. Based on a comparative analysis of Ficino's translation of Plato's divided line and other humanist translations of the same passage, Hankins (1986: 295) argued convincingly that Ficino "comes down firmly on the side of the Neoplatonic interpretation of this passage." He also offered a comparison with Proclus's *In R.* to make the point. Ficino could not have known Proclus's *In R.* when he first translated Plato's *Resp.*, since Janus Lascaris (c. 1445–1535) only brought the manuscript to Florence in 1492 (Ficino 1576: 1: 937; see also Piccolomini 1874). Rather than being Proclean sensu stricto, Ficino's interpretation and translation follows Iamblichus (although I will demonstrate later in this chapter that Ficino was also interpreting the divided line in light of other works by Proclus, notably *Pl. Th.*). The similarities between Ficino's rendering of the divided line and Proclus's schematic interpretation can be explained by the fact that they are both utilizing a common source, namely, Iamblichus's *De com. math. sc.*

129. Ficino 1576: 2: 1408.

130. Ibid.: 2: 1280–81.

131. See, for instance, Brumbaugh 1952; Lafrance 1987; Aubenque 1992.

132. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09. Plato 1491: f. 291r (trans. Ficino).

133. Iamblichus, *De com. math. sc.* 38.15–28; on this passage see Napolitano Valditara 2000: 67–69.

134. Ficino 1576: 2: 1281.

135. I limit myself to citing Thesleff 1961: 8–11, 75–77, 92–96; 1965: 2–48; Burkert 1972a: 27, 78, 84, 92, 221–22, 384–89, 442–47 et passim; Huffman 2007; Brisson 2008; 2013; and Schofield 2014.

136. Ficino 1576: 2: 1535. On Archytas and Ficino see also Allen 1994: 48, 64–65.

137. Huffman 2007: esp. 3–43.

138. Brisson 2008; 2013.

139. Thesleff 1961: 12, 78, 101, 104–16; 1965: 54–56; Burkert 1972a: 114.

140. Lefèvre d'Etaples 1496.

141. Valla 1501: lib.1. cap. 6; Diacceto 1563: 165 = [facsimile 2009].

142. Omont 1888: 40; Hadot 1990: 295–96.

143. (Lemma: 1091b4) Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In Arist. metaph.* 1891: 821.32–822.2; Thesleff 1965: 56.

144. (Lemma: 1086b14) Syrianus, *In metaph.* 1902: 165.33–66.8; Thesleff 1965: 56. Cf. Plato, *Resp.* 509b6–10; (Lemma: 1091b6) Syrianus, *In metaph.* 1902: 182.30–83.21; Thesleff 1965: 56.

145. As a reminder, these two manuscripts are MSS. Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09 and Plut. 59.01.

146. Greene 1938: 246 (Plato, *Resp.* 510d); *Platonis Dialogi* 1853: xxxi–xxxii, 350–51; Ruhnken 1800: 176–79.

147. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 70, f. 3v. For the transcription see Saffrey 1959: 84–85.

148. Proclus, *El. Th.* proposition 55; see also propositions 29, 28, 48, 49. On Ficino and Proclus's *El Th.* see Robichaud 2016a.

149. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 70, f. 3v. Saffrey 1959: 174.

150. Ibid.

151. Ibid.: 179–80; 174, n. 232: "Iamblicus ostendit: *locum non inveni*."

152. Ibid.: 182. It is also Gentile's conclusion (1990) that Ficino translated the *De sect. Pyth.* very early in his philosophical career. I first published this corroborative evidence in Robichaud 2016b. If Ficino did in fact translate Plato's dialogues for Cosimo in a rush, it would have been difficult for him to translate the large *De sect. Pyth.* at the same time. It is more likely that he had already studied and translated it.

153. MS. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, cod. Gr. 182, f. 41r. Thesleff 1965: 55.

154. Burkert 1972a: 28–52 (esp. 30–31), 230–31, et passim.

155. Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1091b.

156. The text of the lecture is available in MS. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5953, ff. 321r–26r; Ficino 1576: 1: 761–63; and Podolak 2011: 103–09.

157. Albertson 2014.

CHAPTER 5. PLATO

Note to epigraph: Augustine, *Conf.* 7.9.14.

1. See Pépin 1977. Prosopopoeia was also an exegetical technique used by patristic commentators on the Gospels and especially on the Psalms, where the exegete was concerned to identify who was speaking to whom about whom, identifying the moments when the Psalms were pronounced *in persona Christi*. See Andresen 1961; Hadot 1973; Rondeau 1985.

2. A small sample of the vast literature on the topic: Henry 1934; Courcelle 1950; 1954; Solignac 1958; 1962: esp. 55–113, 145–52, 161–63, 256–57, 679–703; du Roy 1966: 68–70; Hadot 1968; Pépin 1977; Madec 1989; 1996; Beatrice 1989.

3. Ficino 1576: 1: 956: On this letter see Allen 1998: 74; 1984; della Torre 1902: 592. On Ficino and Augustine, see n. 39 in my Introduction.

4. Ficino 1576: 1: 956.

5. More generally, Ficino's use of Platonic scholia has been all but ignored. An exception is Allen 1989: 90–95. Many of the scholia from the *Leg.* dealing with historical and lexical questions are completely ignored by Ficino in his *epitomes*, though they are at times taken into account in his translations. Beyond the examples discussed in this book, in his *epitomes* Ficino draws on the scholia explicitly on only one more occasion, for material about Diana and *hermae* at *Leg.* 914b: Ficino 1576: 2: 1522. He states explicitly, however, that his argumenta are not commentaries, which would presumably include more of the historical and lexical material found in the scholia: ibid.: 2: 1490.

6. For the topic see Merlan 1947; Edelstein 1962; Plass 1964; 1967; Tigerstedt 1977: 92–94; Kosman 1992; Annas 1999: 9–30; Tarrant 2000a; and the various studies assembled in Press 2000.

7. Diog. Laert. 3.51–52.

8. On Ficino and the *Epin.* see Allen 2012. On Ficino and Plato's *Epist.* see Allen 2008b; Wind 1968: 2–3, 37–31, 243–444. Ficino confirms his hermeneutical framework for Plato in his *Platonic Theology* (Ficino 2001–6: 17.4.5–6) where he writes that it is in the *Leg.* that "ipsa Platonis persona loquitur." The most thorough study of book 17 is Allen 1998: 51–92. See also Celenza 1999. On Ficino and Plato's *Leg.* see Neschke-Hentschke 1999; 2000; Allen 2012; Robichaud 2014.

9. On MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09, see my Chapter 2, nn. 30 and 35, and n. 44 below.

10. Ficino 1576: 2: 1488. See Augustine, *C. acad.* 3.17.37; *De civ. D.* 8.4. Allen (1982b: 173–75) points out a similarity with Apuleius, *De dog. Plat.* 1.3. It is only appropriate that Ficino

draws on Apuleius's work when commenting on the *Leg.*, the dialogue which he believes holds Plato's own doctrines. Besides Apuleius Ficino could have drawn on three other important sources to find dogmas in Plato's *Leg.*: Alcinous's *Didaskalikos*; Eusebius's *Praep. evang.* and Proclus's *Pl. Th.* It should be noted, however, that none of these works identifies the Athenian Stranger as Plato himself. On the *Leg.* in Eusebius see des Places 1981: 199–269. On Eusebius and Platonism: des Places 1982. Celenza, who looks briefly at this passage too, makes an adroit observation (1999: 687–89, esp. n. 71): one of the principal reasons Ficino judges the *Resp.* to be more Pythagorean than Platonic is that its arguments on communal property are in agreement with the Pythagorean *akousma*, or precept, that "among friends all things are held in common"—which is the closing phrase of the *Phdr.*, whereas, as Ficino believes, in the *Leg.* the opinion is repudiated. The *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, 40 and 45, distinguishes between three Platonic states corresponding to the *Epist.*, *Leg.* and *Resp.* See also Dillon 2001: 244. On the tripartite division see also Alcinous, *Didaskalikos*, chapter 34; Proclus, *In R.* 1.1.9–10, 17.

11. Ficino is also broadly in line with Middle and later Platonic sources (Eudorus, Apuleius, Numenius of Apamea, and later Augustine and Proclus) in thinking of Platonic, Socratic, and Pythagorean elements in the corpus. For ancient sources see fragment 25 of Eudorus in Stobaeus, *Anth.* 1884–1912: 2.7.3,49.8; Mazzarelli 1985; Tarrant 1993: 76; 2000: 72–74; Numénius 1973: fr. 24; and Proclus, *In Ti.* 1.7.18–1.8.4. On Platonic serioludere in the Renaissance see Allen 1986: 2: 417–55; Wind 1968: 236.

12. I argue this point in relation to Proclus in n. 23 below.

13. For Proclus's judgment on the *Leg.* see *Anonymous Prolegomena*, ed. Westerink 1962: 25.1–10, 26.9; Dillon 2001: 243. On the *Epin.* see Proclus, *In R.* 3.134.5–7; Proclus, *In Eucl.* 42.9 Other doubts about the authenticity of the *Epin.* and speculations that it was composed by Philip of Opus, Plato's amanuensis, can be found in Diog. Laert. 3.37; and *Suidae Lexicon*, ed. Alder 1928–39: s.v. "Philosophos." See also Tarán 1975; Dillon 2003. O'Meara debunks (2007) the myth that the Neoplatonists had no interest in the *Leg.* and politics.

14. Proclus, *In R.* 65, 1.1.11.

15. O'Meara 2007.

16. I quote from Proclus, *Th. Pl.* 1.13.17–22. Ficino's transcription of Proclus's *Th. Pl.* 1.14 is in MS. Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, cod. F. 19 sup., ff. 212r–14v. This passage is located immediately after a brief quotation from *Epin.* 973c–d and Proclus, *El. Th.* proposition 20. The manuscript contains a large number of often long quotations from Plato, Plotinus, Proclus, and *Orphic Hymns*. As a reminder, Ficino studied and wrote long notes on *Th. Pl.* in MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 70.

17. The authenticity of the *Leg.* (along with the *Epin.*) was often discounted in the nineteenth century until Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff accepted it as a genuine work by Plato. The identification of the anonymous Stranger, however, has varied: Ast (1816: 388–89) pointed out difficulties in understanding the Athenian Stranger. Grote (1885–88: 4: 273, n. 1) offered comments on the relationship of the identification of the Athenian Stranger to the dramatic setting and the dogmatic tone of the dialogue. Friedländer (1964: 1: 134–35, 141, and 3: 360) argued that Plato makes the Athenian Stranger anonymous so as to distance his person from what Socrates represents to Plato. He sees more of Solon in him than Socrates. Morrow (1960: 74) says: "In no other dialogue do we feel less of a dramatic screen between ourselves and Plato. The anonymity of the Athenian means that there is no independent character to be sustained, as is true of the Socratic dialogues, even the *Republic*; and Plato is free as nowhere else to put forward his own doctrines." For Strauss (1975: passim, esp. 1–2) the Athenian Stranger represents counterfactual history, as though Socrates had fled to Crete instead of accepting his fate

at the hands of Athenian justice. Gadamer (1980: 71) claims that it is "the Athenian in whom more than anyone Plato has most obviously hidden himself." Szlezák (1993: 2, 21–22) thinks that the Athenian Stranger remains anonymous in order better to reflect his city's culture, but that Plato did not wish to hide anonymously behind his characters. More recently, Zuckert (2004; 2009: 11–12, 31–33, 82–146) argued that the dramatic date of the *Leg.* is a period between the Persian and Peloponnesian wars, thus turning the Athenian Stranger into a figure for pre-Socratic philosophy.

18. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1265a.

19. Cicero, *Leg.* 1.4.15.

20. Tarrant 2000b.

21. Basil, *Epist.* 135.

22. On Oxyrhynchus Papyrus no. 3219 see Tarrant 2000b: 69–71.

23. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09, f. 289v. For a transcription see Greene 1938: 296. For the scholarship on this manuscript see my Chapter 2, nn. 30 and 35, and n. 44 below. Mettauer (1880: 27–32) argued that Proclus was the source for the scholion, based in part on a claim that Proclus also identified (*In R.* 1.186.30–87.23) the Athenian Stranger as "Plato ipse." Yet Proclus does not seem to be addressing any kind of Platonic question there; he is simply quoting Plato.

24. Ficino also seems to find confirmation of Plato's identity as the Athenian Stranger through the accounts of his travels: Ficino 1576: 1: 765.

25. Ficino 1576: 1: 866–67. For the date of this letter see Chapter 4 n. 106.

26. For Poliziano's use of the architectural metaphor see Chapter 2. On the use of this metaphor in Varro, Proclus, and Poliziano see Robichaud 2010; 2017b. See also Courcelle 1970: 241, n. 165.

27. Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.9.11; Proclus, *In Alc.* 1.5.1–14; Marinus, *Vita Procli* 13; see Robichaud 2010; 2017b.

28. Augustine, *C. acad.* 3.18.41.

29. See, e.g., des Places 1964.

30. See, e.g., Ficino 1576: 1: 667 (*Lettere* 1990–2010: 1: 218), 947–48, 2: 1128–29, 1136–37, 1537–38, 1548, 1836 (Hermes Trismegistus 2011: 3–6); Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, 11.5.3, trans. Allen 2001–6. The impact on Ficino of the *Asclepius*, which depicts a theological dialogue perhaps in the adyton itself, cannot be neglected.

31. Ficino 1576: 1: 866.

32. Both Celenza (2010: 207, n. 16) and Wesseling (Poliziano 1986: 46) believe that in calling him Atheniensis Senex Poliziano is playing on the fact that it sounds similar to the Greek Ἀθηναῖος ξένος. I would add that it seems appropriate that, for Ficino, the Athenian Stranger should be called Atheniensis Senex if he is Plato communicating dogmas, since Plutarch tells us (*De Is. et Os.* 48.370) that Plato expressed his doctrines more explicitly in his old age. Thus Ficino did not just identify the Athenian Stranger as Plato but as the aged Plato. See also Allen 2012: 489.

33. On Ficino and atheism see Hankins 2011b; Robichaud 2013.

34. Plato, *Resp.* 381c–d.

35. Plato, *Leg.* 715e, trans. Bury 1984.

36. The Orphic fragment can be found in Kern 1972: fr. 21. Kern categorises the hymn among the *Fragmenta veteriora*, 90–93. See also West 1983: 89–90. Burkert (1969: 11, n. 25) suggests that Plato may also be drawing on Orphic fragment 158 in describing Δίκη as following Zeus. As demonstrated by Gentile (1983; 2006: 159–161; Ficino, *Lettere* 1990–2010: ccxlvi–vii and

2: xl–xlii), Ficino first worked with the hymn through Niccolò Siculo's Latin translation of the pseudo-Aristotelian *De mundo*.

37. Proclus, *Pl. Th.* 6.8, and *In Parm.* 6.1113–16. Dillon (2001) discusses Neoplatonic readings of this passage as well as other parts of the *Leg.*

38. "ὁ δὴ θεὸς ἡμῖν πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἂν εἴη μάλιστα, καὶ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἤ πού τις, ὥς φασιν, ἄνθρωπος." Plato, *Leg.* 716c, trans. Bury 1984.

39. Ficino 1576: 2: 1500. Trinkaus (1976: 206) mentions the passage about Protagoras but does not discuss Ficino's interpretation of the variant.

40. See Plato, *Tht.* 153d, where the golden chain of Zeus is presented as an absolute measure to argue against the relativism of Protagoras's theory that man is the measure of all things, and *Tht.* 161c, where Socrates mocks Protagoras by comparing it to the idea of pigs or baboons as being the measure of all things.

41. See Robichaud 2014; 2017b.

42. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09. For this manuscript and the scholarship see Chapter 2, nn. 30 and 35, and n. 44 below.

43. The origin of the variation was perhaps an iotacism of the comparative ἤ and the conditional conjunction εἴ: modern philologists also change enclitic accents on the upsilon and iota of πού τις.

44. The two variants found in Ficino's manuscript, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09 (*c*), occur in the so-called Vatican Plato: MS. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Gr. 1 (*O*), and in MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 59.01 (*a*). This is to be expected, since (*c*) is an apograph of (*a*) and, as demonstrated by Post (1934: 36–39), the text of the *Leg.* in (*a*) is a very accurate copy of (*O*). The reading ἤ πού τις occurs as the principal one in another important Plato manuscript: MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1807 (*A*). Post (1934: 9–14; 1928) has demonstrated that (*O*) is independent of (*A*) until *Leg.* 746c, but that nevertheless, numerous readings of the text of *Leg.* books 1–5 in (*A*) are found as variants in the margins of (*O*). The variant reading ἤ πού τις in (*O*) is written in a hand referred to by Greene in his *Scholia Platonica* as (O^4). Thus Greene (1938: 317) lists the scholion as: "716c ἤ πού τις (A: εἴ που τίς O). τοῦ πατριάρχου τὸ βιβλίον· ἤ πού τις (O^4)." There is an ongoing argument in the literature on these manuscripts as to whether the scholia in (*O*) refer to a certain "book of the patriarch." See, most recently and with further references, Luzzatto 2008. On MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 59.01 see also Chapter 2, nn. 30 and 35.

45. Ficino 1576: 2: 1500.

46. See n. 31 above, and nn. 51 and 53 below.

47. Hankins 1990a: 2: 470–71; Gentile 1987; Pagani 2011.

48. Bessarion 1503: f. 92v.

49. See, e.g., a manuscript copy of George of Trebizond's translation: MS. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 304, f. 48v. It is possible that George was not aware of the dogmatic implications of his translation.

50. See Gentile's discussion (1983; 2006) of Ficino's use of two variants in the Orphic hymn.

51. Ficino 1576: 1: 431.

52. On Ficino and Pseudo-Dionysius see Moffit Watts 1987; Cristiani 1993; Toussaint 1999; Vasoli 2001; Pseudo-Dionysius 2011 (trans. Ficino); Ficino 2015; Robichaud 2016a.

53. Ficino 1576: 2: 1029–30 (Ficino 2015: 1: *On Divine Names*: 126 (15). This passage is also now available in Pseudo-Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus* 2011: 15.59–70 (trans. Ficino); and in Ficino, *On Dionysius the Areopagite*, *De divinis nominibus* 2015: 15.9. See also Ficino, *De Christiana*

religione in 1576: 1: 71. For Ficino's writings on the Incarnation in general in this work see esp. chaps. XV–XXIII (1576: 1: 20–26).

54. Ficino mentions Amelius in the following locations: 1576: 1: 17, 71, 867, 965, and 2: 1029, 1044, 1155, 1408, 1439, 1664; Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, 2.4.5; Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 146. On Amelius see esp. Brisson 1987, and the works cited there; Corrigan 1987. On Amelius and the Gospel of John see Amelius 1956 and Dörrie 1972.

55. Ficino 1576: 1: 71.

56. Dörrie (1972) compares the anonymous Platonist with Amelius in order to present an analogous interpretation of the Eusebius fragment.

57. Augustine, *De civ. D.* 10.29.

58. Ficino 1576: 1: 71.

59. Ibid. 1: 866. The saying attributed to Numenius of Apamea is found in Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 11.10.14; and in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.22.150. Ficino also quotes this famous adage when interpreting the *Leg.* in his *Platonic Theology*, 17.4.6. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (2002: 156 [no. 602]) makes a similar association between the *Leg.* and the Old Testament in his third conclusion about Plato's doctrine. For Numenius see esp. *Fragments* (1973); Dodds 1960; Invernizzi 1978; Dillon 1996: 361–79; Fuentes González 2005; O'Meara, 2006: 9–14. Ficino mentions Numenius in the following locations: 1576: 1: 17, 25, 29, 756, 855, 866, 925, 956, and 2: 1823, 1439, 1449, 1553–54, 1711; Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, 3.1.3, 5.14.7, 10.2.3, 10.2.9, 17.3.10, 17.4.6; Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 147.

60. Brisson (1987: 801–2) also discusses the hypothesis that Amelius followed in Numenius's footsteps by moving to Apamea later in life.

61. Ficino 1576: 1: 867.

62. Ibid.

63. Although they mistakenly emend Amelius into Aurelius (St. Augustine), the translators of Ficino's letters (Ficino 1975–2015: 7: 106–7) propose an interesting reading of his change from three to three thousand tabernacles by comparing it to the three thousand souls converted to Christianity during Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Similarly, in his earlier lecture, known as the *De Platonica philosophia natura, institutione, actione*, Ficino concludes (1576: 763), after explaining the goal of Platonism is to become like God, that philosophers interpret the mysteries of God to convert men to him, and that philosophers dwell among Hesiod's thirty thousand daemons, demigods, and blessed heroes. Is there a connection for Ficino between the three thousand and the thirty thousand? See Hesiod, *Op.* 121–26; 248–55. Augustine's comments are in *De civ. D.* 2.7. See my earlier discussion in Chapter 3. Ficino (1576: 1: 886) prints an *oratio* explaining why Platonic philosophy should be read *in sacris*, referring to the practices of ancient Pythagoreans as a precedent. On Ficino's sermons and lectures see n. 73 below.

64. Church fathers had previous attempted to accommodate Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism's ὁμοίωσις θεῷ to Christianity. Because of the derivation of multiplicity from the One, Neoplatonists proposed different forms of mediation, which Christian theologians circumscribe in various ways for reasons of orthodoxy to the single mediation of Christ and his grace. For further discussion on Platonic divinization and the different approaches of the fathers see the following sample works in the large literature on the topic: Butterworth 1916; Gross 1938; Merki 1952; Theodorou 1961; Lot Borodine 1970; Comoth 1999; Christensen and Wittung 2007; Finlan and Kharlamov 2006–11; Russel 2006. Some (Lavecchia: 2006: 419, n. 13) have even pointed to the similarities with (and perhaps influence on) the Septuagint translation of Genesis 26: "καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ'εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ'ὁμοίωσιν."

65. Des Places's various studies on the indirect traditions of the *Leg.* are now collected (1981).

66. Monfasani (2009) has shown that Ficino read George of Trebizond's translation of the *Prep. evang.* and that he often used Eusebius for un-Eusebian purposes. Ficino does not quote the anecdote about Numenius from George verbatim. There are differences that could perhaps be explained by variants in the manuscripts and printed editions of George's text (which I have not verified). It is also possible that because Ficino knew the passage very well, he may have been quoting it from memory; or that, in addition, he knew the passage in Greek, from a manuscript which is yet to be identified.

67. Augustine, *De ord.* 1.11.32.

68. Augustine, *Retract.* 1.3.2. For a discussion of this passage see Pépin 1977: xiii, 127–28, 189.

69. Augustine, *De civ. D.* 8.9.

70. Augustine, *C. acad.* 3.20.43. Ficino 1576: 1: 769.

71. Augustine, *Retract.* 1.1.4.

72. Augustine levels the accusation against Porphyry in *De civ. D.* 10, e.g., 10.10, where he accuses the Platonists of imitating the shape-shifting Proteus and of casting their own nets for souls with theurgy. On Augustine's use of Proteus to characterize the relationship of truth and verisimilitude while discussing the Platonists see *C. acad.* 3.5.11–6.13.

73. On Ficino's public lectures and sermons: Allen 1977; Toussaint 2004; Robichaud 2006; Podolak 2011 and Ficino 2014.

74. Augustine, *C. acad.* 3.18.41. Allen (1998: 92) rightly notes a parallel here.

75. Ficino 1576: 2: 1548.

76. Ibid. Matthew 3:17, during the baptism of Christ. See Saffrey 1996; Wind 1968: 24.

77. The 1580 Basel edition by Perna bowdlerizes the passage, changing "filius" into "discipulum"; see Plotinus 1580: sig. a6r. In his edition of the *Enn.* Creuzer (1835) replaced the passage with the description of Tiresias: "He alone is wise, the others hover like shades" (*Od.* 10.495); see Saffrey 1996, where Creuzer's emendation is also quoted.

78. Augustine, *De civ. D.* 9.17.

79. Augustine, *De ver. rel.* 4.7.

80. Ficino 1576: 2: 1525–26.

81. Ibid.: 1529–30.

82. *Anonymous Prolegomena*, 25.3–12, ed. Westerink 1960. See also Proclus, *In R.* 2.134, 5f and *In Eucl.* 42.9. For a discussion of the authenticity of the *Epin.* in antiquity see Tarán 1975: 115–39; and more recently the studies contained in Alesse et al. 2012.

83. Diog. Laert. 3.37; and *Suidae Lexicon*, ed. Alder 1928–39: s.v. "Philosophos." In recent scholarship, Tarán (1975: 133–39) has led the charge in defending the authorship of Philip of Opus, but Brisson (2005) has questioned even this attribution. It seems that the last two scholars who defended the thesis that the *Epin.* is one of Plato's authentic dialogues were des Places (an expert on the *Leg.*) and Festugière. While doubts remain, most at present accept the hypothesis that the work dates from early Platonism and shows signs pointing to the teachings of Hellenistic schools of philosophy.

84. Ficino 1576: 1: 766.

85. Ibid.: 1526–27.

86. Porphyry, *Plot.* 23; Porphyry relates this account of Plotinus's life in light of his Oracle. On Plotinus's Oracle and Ficino see my Chapter 3, n. 51.

87. Plato, *Epin.* 986c1–d4, trans. Taylor 1996.

88. Sedley 1999: 309–28.

89. Plato, *Epin.* 991c.

90. Ficino 1576: 2: 1526.

91. Ibid.: 1526–27.

92. On Ficino and dialectic or the dialectical copestone Allen 1998: 149–193 is still essential.

93. Despite the *Epin.*'s important place in Ficino's understanding of Plato's corpus, Allen (2012) is the only scholar to have studied Ficino's interpretation of it. He too emphazies the Christological dimensions to Ficino's reading.

94. See Allen 2012: 471.

95. Linguiti 2012.

96. See Giardina's discussion (2012: 371–75).

97. Proclus, *In Eucl.* 35 (1.14), trans. Morrow 1992.

98. Chapter 6 of the *De com. math. sc.* is particularly important.

99. Giardina 2012: 371–75.

100. See *De com. math. sc.* 28.1–16. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 86.03, f. 91r. On this manuscript see Kristeller 1986: 1: 88–89; Sicherl 1966: 201–25.

101. Giardina 2012: 371–75.

102. Nicomachus of Gerasa, *Introd. arith.* 1.7; Ficino 1576: 2: 1526.

103. Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, 17.4.5, 2001–6. I am translating direct from the Latin.

104. Ficino 1576: 2: 1506.

105. Ibid.: 2: 1525.

106. See Plato, *Epist.*, trans. Brisson 1987.

107. See Ficino's comments to *Epist.* 12, 1576: 2: 1536.

108. Ibid.: 2: 1533.

109. Wind 1968: 2–3, 37–31, 243–44; Allen 2008b.

110. Ficino's argumenta to the *Epist.* are at 1576 2: 1530–36.

111. Plato, *Epist.* 2, 310e, trans. Post 1996. See Allen 2008b: 406–8.

112. On the conjoining of power and wisdom in Ficino's thinking see Hankins's remarks on the great conjunction (1990b) and Allen 2008b.

113. Plotinus, *Enn.* 3.8.10.1.

114. On the triad see Chapter 2, n. 62.

115. Ficino 1576: 2: 1530.

116. His use of *vestigia* to talk about nature might also suggest that Ficino was working not only with Plotinus to write this argumentum but also with Proclus. See my discussion of Ficino's understanding of Plotinus and Proclus on nature in Robichaud 2016a.

117. See Allen 2008b: 408.

118. Plato *Epist.* 2, 311b–d, trans. Post 1996. See Allen 2008b: 408–10.

119. Ficino 1576: 2: 1531.

120. Ibid.: 2: 1534.

121. Augustine, *De civ. D.* 10.9, 10.23–24, 19.23.

122. Augustine quotes Porphyry: ibid. 19.23. On this passage see O'Meara 1959: 57–59.

123. Plato *Epist.* 2, 312d–13a, trans. Post 1996.

124. Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.8.2, 5.1.8, 6.7.42; Proclus, *Pl. Th.* 2.8.9; Proclus, *In Ti.* 1.306.1–14, 3.103.18–28.

125. Ficino 1576: 2: 1325 (*De amore*, 1956: 150–51); Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, 11.4.6–7 and 14.10.4.

126. Ficino 1576: 2: 1531.

127. Ibid.: 2: 1533. See also Wind 1968: 241–55; Allen 1984b.

128. Plato *Epist.* 2, 314a–d, Post 1996. Ficino also refers to the metallurgic imagery from this passage in a letter to Bessarion: Ficino 1576: 1: 617. I discuss this letter briefly in my 2010: 132–33.

129. It serves as the cornerstone of the thesis made by the students and philosophers associated with the Tübingen school concerning Plato's oral teachings. Rist (1965b) has proposed the reading that the letter is in fact a Pythagorean pseudepigraphic text.

130. Ficino 1576: 2: 1535.

131. Ibid.

132. On συναφή and Ficino see Robichaud 2017a; Robichaud and Soranzo 2017. On Plotinus and the idea of touching by sight see Vasiliu 2015.

133. Ficino 1576: 2: 1532.

134. Ibid.: 2: 1548.

135. On the comparison of Plato and Plotinus's styles see also Robichaud 2010. For an analysis of Plotinus's language, see Schwyzer 1951; Sleeman and Pollet 1980; O'Brien 1982–92a. On Plotinus's famed brevity see Macrobius's comments (*Comment. in Somn. Scip.* 2.12.7): "Plotinus, magis quam quisquam verborum parcus." See Pépin 1982–92: 498–99.

136. On this passage see O'Brien 1982–92b.

137. Porphyry, *Plot.* 3.35–6.37.

138. Porphyry, *Plot.* 8.19–23. MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816, f. 5r. On this manuscript see Henry 1948: 16–36, 45–62; Kristeller 1986: 112; Gentile et al. 1984: 21, 122; Förstel 2006; Robichaud 2016a; 2017a; 2017b.

139. Porphyry, *Plot.* 18.1–8. MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816, f. 8v.

140. Porphyry, *Plot.* 18.20–23. MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816, f. 8v.

141. Porphyry, *Plot.* 14.1–4, in Plotinus, *Enn.* ed. Henry and Schwyzer 1987.

142. MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816, f. 6v.

143. Porphyry, *Plot.* 14 in Plotinus, *Enn*. trans Ficino 1580.

144. Porphyry, *Plot*. 13.5–10. MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816, f. 6v.

145. Porphyry, *Plot.* 23. 14–18.

146. MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816, f. 12v.

147. Ficino 1576: 2: 1535.

148. Ibid.: 2: 1531.

149. Ibid.: 2: 1129.

150. Porphyry, *Vita Pyth*. 18, 57.

151. Iamblichus, *VP* 1937: 3 (14–16).

152. Augustine, *Conf*. 8.6.14–15; 8.12.29.

153. Reitzenstein 1914: esp. 10–19; Festugière 1937. The passages are Athanasius, *VA* 1994 14; Porphyry, *Vita Pyth*. 1998: 34; and Iamblichus, *VP* 1937: 3: (14–16).

154. I quote first from Rubenson (2006: 206), then Edwards (2015: 93). See also Barnes 1986 and Edwards 1993.There is much literature on the philosopher and late ancient holy men, I offer a small sample: Brown 1971; Edwards 2000; and Macris 2006; 2009.

155. On Ficino and conversion see Robichaud and Soranzo 2017.

156. MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816, f. 213v.

157. Ficino 1576: 2: 1129.

158. MS. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1816, f. 188r.

159. Ficino, 1576: 1: 71. Auerbach's observations (2003: 70–75, 99–121) on Christian parataxis and sermo humilis are still valuable.

160. On Ficino's use of Eusebius in an un-Eusebian manner see Monfasani 2009.

161. Ficino thus once more contributes to questions related to humanist debates on the correct style for philosophy, perhaps even—albeit obliquely—to the humanistic debate on Ciceronianism. In fact, in their controversies on philosophical style Giovanni Pico and Barbaro give a

few thoughts to Pythagorean silence, and Giovanni Pico in his famous *Oratio* (1942: 140–42) concisely distilled his interpretation of Plotinus's style in saying that even the Platonists sweating with exertion can barely understand his style. If Giovanni Pico and Barbaro earned their fame for their sophisticated rhetorical analysis of various Latin philosophical styles of prose in their dispute, Ficino's place as a humanist arbiter of style, specifically styles of philosophical language, should not be neglected. In other words, Ficino—perhaps one of Pico's so-called sweating Platonists—worked on studying what kind of prose (as well as symbolic approaches to language) appropriately conforms to Greek philosophical subject matters. See also Allen's remarks on Plotinus and style in Ficino, *Platonic Theology* 2001–6: 1: ix and 2014a: 450–51. Not every reader of Plotinus has been as enthusiastic about his style and philosophy as Ficino. Schopenhauer makes more than a passing mention of Plotinus's writing style. Indeed, he begins his discussion of the Neoplatonists as follows: "Die lektüre der Neuplatoniker erfordert viel Geduld; weil es ihnen sämmtlich an Form und Vortrag gebricht" (1877: 61). Although he praises Plotinus for being the first idealist philosopher, he also disapproves (ibid.) of his style. Schopenhauer concludes that his style notwithstanding, Plotinus has great merits as a philosopher and deserves to be read carefully. But in calling Plotinus's style prolix, Schopenhauer is disagreeing with a long-lasting tradition of judging the chief characteristic of Plotinus's prose to be brevity, not prolixity. Schopenhauer is not the first to compare Plotinus's style to that of the Christian Gospel. While Schopenhauer compared Plotinus's style to that of the Christian Gospel in order to cast aspersions on the Neoplatonist, Ficino compared the two styles favorably. On many occasions Ficino even characterizes his own prose as brief or "brevissime." One example that draws specifically from Plotinus can be found at Ficino 1576: 1: 618. I also discuss this letter in Robichaud 2010. Later readers took note of Ficino's style of writing. Brucker observes (1766–67: 4: 54–55) that Ficino's prose imitates Plotinus's style: "Tacemus affectatam obscuritatem praecipue in Plotino, qua philosophum in se difficilem et latentibus sententiis obscurum novis tenebris involuit, et metaphysicum scribendi genus, breve, concisum, abstractum, Latino sermone infeliciter haud raro imitatus est." On Brucker see especially Catana 2005; 2013a; 2013b. Brucker, like Schopenhauer, does not shy away from demonstrating his dislike for Neoplatonic style. Yet in Brucker the judgment seems particularly severe, since the philosophical words express and exemplify esoteric and eclectic, rather than critical, doctrines. Like Ficino, Brucker acutely notes the link between Plotinian brachylogy and apophatic philosophy, but unlike Ficino he disapproves of this mode of philosophy. Ficino, it is safe to say, set the tone for discussions on Plotinus's writings well into the nineteenth century.

CONCLUSION

Note to epigraphs: Gianfrancesco Pico 1557–73: 2: 743. Montaigne 1965: 230; 233; 237.

1. Fowden 1986: 177–212; Ficino, as Gentile (Gentile and Gilly 1999: 98) and Toussaint (intro. to Iamblichus 1497 [facsimile 2006]: xiv) observe, marks the sole instance where Proclus mentions the *Hermetica* while discussing Iamblichus in his *In Ti.* manuscript: MS. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 24, f. 143v.

2. Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 1–11.

3. Ibid.: 2: 137.

4. Ibid.: 2: 135. Ficino's Avendantes should be understood as the medieval Arab to Latin translator Avendauth (likely the Jewish scholar Ibn Daud, and falsely identified with Johannes Hispanus or Hispalensis). According to Albert the Great, Avendauth prepared the *Liber de causis* from the writings of Aristotle, Avicenna, al-Ghazali, and al-Farabi, and some of the manuscripts

of the *Liber de causis* also identify Avendauth as its author. Ficino elsewhere attributes the *Liber de causis* to al-Farabi (see Robichaud 2016a: 52) but we know that it is a translation of an Arabic compendium and paraphrase largely of Proclus and Plotinus from ninth-century Baghdad. See d'Alverny 1954; Bertolacci 2002; 2011; and the works that I cite in n. 42 of the Introduction. The *Liber de causis* is one of the most important sources for the transmission in the Middle Ages of Neoplatonic ἐπιστροφή/conversio, which is precisely what interests Ficino in the passage that I am discussing. On Ficino's early and repeated engagement with this aspect of Neoplatonic philosophy see Robichaud 2016a; and Robichaud and Soranzo 2017.

5. The excerpts from Augustine *De civ. D.* 8.6 and 8.8 are in MS. Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, cod. S. 14 sup., ff. 145v and 172r.

6. Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 135.

7. See Chapter 4, nn. 23 and 51.

8. Ficino, *Platonic Theology* 2001–6: book 17.

9. Schleiermacher 1996: 32. My brief concluding remarks on Ficino and Schleiermacher are based on a longer study (2016c), where I demonstrate how Schleiermacher read Ficino's Latin Plato.

10. Lamm 2000: 207. See also Lamm's useful study (2005) of Schleiermacher; von Stein 1965: 3: 375.

11. Schleiermacher 1996: 25.

12. MS. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Plut. 85.09.

13. Robichaud 2006. The biographical genre of studying Plato continued into Schleiermacher's day: Tennemann 1772–95; Ast 1816.

14. Schleiermacher 1992: 45. On the question of "Platonic Orientalism" see Jeck 2004; and for a discussion of Ficino and the religious polemics surrounding "Platonic Orientalism" see Robichaud and Soranzo 2017.

15. Despite his hesitation to use later external evidence of the tradition to determine the authenticity of each dialogue and the organizational structure of the corpus, Schleiermacher acknowledges (1996: 87) that ancients also chose to begin Plato's corpus with the *Phdr.* Diog. Laert. (3.38) and the late ancient commentator Olympiodorus (*In Alc.* 2.62–65) indicate that the *Phdr.* was Plato's most youthful dialogue. This is not to say that influence means acceptance. Even in rejection and criticism there is influence. A detailed analysis of Schleiermacher as a reader of ancient sources to interpret Plato would make an interesting study. His *Introductions* to the dialogues of Plato note a few references not only to Aristotle, Diogenes Laertius, and Olympiodorus but also to the likes of Plutarch, Simplicius, and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. The notes to his translations reveal further sources, including Ficino, as I demonstrate in Robichaud 2016c.

16. Plato 1781–87. On the study of Plato in this period see Beierwaltes 2000; Neschke-Hentschke 2008a; 2008b. The volume as a whole contains valuable studies on hermeneutics and philosophy from the period. See also the introduction to Schleiermacher 1996; Richard's introduction to Schleiermacher 2004, and Robichaud 2016c.

17. See Neschke-Hentschke 2008: 206, n. 49; on Wolf and Plato see Plato ed. Wolf 1782; Plato ed. Wolf 1812. Wolf prepared a course entitled *Allgemeine Übersicht oder Grundrisse der Dialogen Platons, eine Einleitung in das Studium dieses Philosophen* (1781). See Wolf 1869: 1: 148; Kört 1833: 78; Schleiermacher 2004: 7–10. On Wolf in general see Wolf 1985; Grafton 1981.

18. Plato ed. Wolf 1812: v–viii.

19. Kristeller 1937–45: 2: 107.

20. Dedication in Plato ed. Bekker 1816–18.

21. I limit myself to a few important studies: Siebenkees 1798; Ruhnken 1800; Mettauer 1880. Gaisford (1812) first published the *Arethae scholia* found in the famous manuscript (now

MS. Oxford Bodl. Clark. 39) from the monastery of St. John, which came into the hands of E. D. Clarke (1769–1822) in 1801. Bekker, Herman, Beck, Baiter, et al. publish scholia in their editions of Plato. The standard edition for the Platonic scholia is Greene ed. 1938, but see most recently Cufalo ed. 2007.

22. Gadamer 2004: 294. On this particular point see my discussion (2017b) on Ficino and Schleiermacher's divinatory philologies.

23. Neschke-Hentschke also observes (2008b: 198, n. 5) this fact.

24. Ast based his Latin translation on Cornarius, but Bekker, Hirschig, Schneider, et al. chose to publish Ficino's Latin. For a census of the printed editions of Ficino's translations see Hankins 1990a: 2: 738–95.

25. Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, preface: 8–11, trans. Allen 2001–6.

26. Ficino 1576: 1: 930. The specific passage that I cite refers to John 21:11. See also Ficino's letter to Pope Sixtus IV in ibid.: 1: 815.

27. See Plotinus, *Enn*. 4.3.9; Augustine, *Conf*. 1.3.3.; 7.1.2; 7.5.7; 7.20.26.

28. Ficino actually anticipates Roques (1954: 76–77) and Pépin (1956: 59–60) on this point. See Robichaud 2016a: esp. 80–86.

29. See Robichaud forthcoming.

30. Although possible, it is not at all apparent that Ficino had *Pyr*. 1.33.221 in mind when writing about Plato's use of interlocutors. On Sextus Empiricus in the early Renaissance see Schmitt 1967; 1972; Cao 1995; 2001; 2002; 2007; 2009. On Ficino and the skeptical academies see Allen 1998: 56–62.

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A number of valuable studies on Marsilio Ficino have been published in the past century, and I do not purport that *Plato's Persona* supersedes them in every way. My work is neither one of many studies of the influence of Ficino's *De amore* on Renaissance aesthetics, like André Chastel's *Marsile Ficin et l'art* (1954), nor an exposition of Ficino's systematic philosophy, like Paul O. Kristeller's *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino* (1988, first edition 1943), nor an intellectual history of *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* as a whole, like James Hankins's work of that title (1990), nor an intellectual biography of Marsilio Ficino, as Raymond Marcel has produced (1958), nor a social and historical study of the "Platonic Academy of Florence," like Arnaldo della Torre's *Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze* (1902) and Arthur Field's *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence* (1988), nor, finally, is it an edition and study of Ficino's commentaries on specific Platonic dialogues in their entirety, as Michael J. B. Allen has notably provided for the *Philebus* (1975), the *Phaedrus* (1981), and the *Sophist* (1989). Rather, I have aimed at filling a gap in scholarship by writing a single volume analyzing Ficino's hermeneutics for understanding the Platonic corpus as a whole. To be sure, I have benefited from some of the previously mentioned studies when they address Ficino's interpretation of Plato, and perhaps most important to my interests are chapters from Hankins's *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* (1990) and Allen's *Synoptic Art* (1998). It goes without saying, however, that my work engages with them and thankfully stands on some of their broad shoulders. To take just a few more examples, this book builds on the superb research on Ficino's manuscripts by Sebastiano Gentile, on the studies of Ficino's virtue ethics by Leo Catana, and on Iamblichus and Pythagoreanism by Christopher S. Celenza. And like so many studies on Ficino and more broadly on Renaissance humanism and philosophy, this book could not have been written without Kristeller's monumental manuscript research and pioneering work on Ficino, which remains the foundation on which so much of the field rests. I leave it to others to judge my work, but I hope my research and novel findings will benefit future scholars.

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